Reviews of National Policies for Education

Quality and Equity of Schooling in the German-speaking Community of Belgium

OECD

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Please cite this publication as:
OECD (2022), *Quality and Equity of Schooling in the German-speaking Community of Belgium*, Reviews of National Policies for Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a6b6f3a-en.

ISBN 978-92-64-64913-2 (print)
ISBN 978-92-64-33872-2 (pdf)

Reviews of National Policies for Education
ISSN 1563-4914 (print)
ISSN 1990-0198 (online)

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Foreword

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the *Gesamtvision Bildung*), which aims to guide reforms to promote greater educational quality and equity. Following a first phase of the process, which consisted of a bottom-up diagnosis based on stakeholder perspectives, the OECD was invited to complement these insights with an international perspective on the German-speaking Community's school system. This Education Policy Review aims to support the development of the *Gesamtvision Bildung* by providing an independent analysis of the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of the Community's education system.

This report presents the findings and recommendations emerging from the review, which was carried out as part of the OECD's *Reviews of National Policies for Education*, undertaken by the Policy Advice and Implementation Division within the Directorate for Education and Skills, with the support of an external expert. The review process involved the preparation of a background report by the German-speaking Community and a two-week virtual visit to conduct interviews with a wide range of experts and stakeholders. The review covers pre-primary to upper secondary education and focuses its analysis on the system's policies and performance in international comparison (Chapter 1), the funding and governance of school education (Chapter 2), policies to support equity and inclusion (Chapter 3), school improvement, leadership and the development of the teaching profession (Chapter 4).

The report highlights the strengths of the German-speaking Community's school system while also identifying some key challenges that the Community will need to address in order to formulate and successfully implement an ambitious overall vision. Building on the analysis, the report proposes several options for future reforms, which highlight opportunities to build on the system's strengths in order to enhance the effectiveness of its resource use and ensure that the system delivers the best outcomes for all students. The OECD review team hopes that the analysis in this report captures the system's many strengths and supports public authorities and stakeholders over the coming years in developing and implementing an ambitious overall vision that will further improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of education in the German-speaking Community.

Acknowledgements

This report on the *Quality and Equity of Schooling in the German-speaking Community of Belgium* is informed by international experience and best practices from OECD countries. The review process involved the preparation of a background report by the German-speaking Community and a two-week virtual visit to conduct interviews with a wide range of experts and stakeholders, which took place in May 2021 (see Annex B).

The OECD review team is indebted to the Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Minister of Education and Scientific Research, Lydia Klinkenberg, and her team for supporting the review. We would like to express our deep gratitude to Rusbeh Nawab, who co-ordinated the German-speaking Community's involvement throughout the review proces, as well as to the many staff members within the Ministry of the German-speaking Community, whose support was invaluable for our work. We are grateful to all those who contributed to the prepartion of the background report and to the wide range of stakeholders who participated in our interviews and generously contributed their views, experiences and knowledge. We are very grateful to the many stakeholders who provided their time, including students, teachers and school school leaders, representatives of various ministry departments, agencies and education institutions, local authorities, teacher unions, researchers and the private sector.

The support of the European Commission for the Education Policy Review of the German-speaking Community is gratefully acknowledged. The European Commission provided financial support from the Erasmus+ programme to co-finance the review and supported the review by participating in virtual meetings and providing guidance, expertise and feedback on drafts of the report. The review team would like to thank in particular Susanne Conze, Livia Ruszthy and Brigitte Devos of *Unit A.2: Country Analysis* for their support.

This report was prepared as part of the OECD's *Reviews of National Policies for Education*, undertaken by the Policy Advice and Implementation Division within the Directorate for Education and Skills. The OECD review team was composed of Luka Boeskens (OECD Secretariat), who co-ordinated the report and led the work on Chapters 1 and 4, Lucie Cerna (OECD Secretariat), who led the work on Chapter 3 and Prof. Rita Nikolai (University of Augsburg), who joined the team as an external expert and led the work on Chapter 2 (see Annex A). Cecilia Mezzanotte (OECD Secretariat) provided significant analytical support and co-drafted Chapter 3. Deborah Nusche participated in the virtual review visit and both Deborah Nusche and Karine Tremblay provided overall guidance for the review.

Within the OECD, the review benefited from the guidance and leadership of Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Paulo Santiago, Head of the Education Policy Advice and Implementation Division. Marco Kools, Beatriz Pont and Giovanni Maria Semeraro provided advice and valuable feedback on drafts of the report. We are also grateful to Daiana Torres Lima, who provided administrative support throughout the project and co-ordinated the publication production with Rachel Linden, to Anne-Victoire Suteau who assisted with the report's editing, and to Cécile Bily who oversaw resource management support.

Table of contents

Foreword 3

Acknowledgements 4

Abbreviations and acronyms 7

Executive summary 9

Assessment and recommendations 13
- Context 13
- Strengths and challenges 15
- Policy recommendations 24

1 The education system of the German-speaking Community of Belgium in comparison 35
- Governance, population and economy of the German-speaking Community 36
- Main features of the German-speaking Community's education system 39
- Performance of the education system 55
- References 62
- Annex 1.A. Additional Figures 66
- Notes 67

2 Governing and funding the education system 70
- Context and main features 71
- Strengths 89
- Challenges 92
- Policy options 105
- References 122
- Notes 131

3 Promoting equity and inclusion 133
- Context and main features 134
- Strengths 143
- Challenges 152
- Policy recommendations 166
- References 179
- Notes 188

4 Strengthening the quality of teaching, school leadership and learning environments 189
Context and main features 190
Strengths 211
Challenges 215
Policy options 228
References 247
Notes 254

Annex A. The OECD review team 257

Annex B. Agenda of the OECD review visit 258

Annex C. Translations of key terms 260

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADHD	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
AESI	*Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire inférieur* - Approved lower-secondary school teacher
AESS	*Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur* - Approved upper-secondary school teacher
AHS	*Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* - Higher education institution of the German-speaking Community
AUBE	*Außerschulische Betreuung* - Out-of-school care
BIDA	*Berufliche Integration durche Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung* – Vocational integration through training guidance in dual education
BSDG	*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* – Association of Catholic Episcopal schools
BVA	*Bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer* - Subsidised contract staff
CAP	*Certificat d'aptitudes pédagogiques* – Pedagogical skills certificate
CPL	Continuing Professional Learning
DELF	*Diplôme d'études en langue française* - Diploma in French Language Studies
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ESCS	Economic, social and cultural status
FSU	*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen* - Free Subsidised Education System
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPGS	*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen* - Good personnel for good schools
GUW	*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen* - Community Education System
GVA	Gross Value Added
IAWM	*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes* - Institute for Vocational and Educational Training in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
IDP	*Institut für Demokratiepädagogik* - Institute for Civic Education
IMK	*Informations- und Medienkompetenz* - Media and information competency
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISEO	*Institut für Schulentwicklung in Ostbelgien* - Institute for school development
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LAP	*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm* - Government's working programme
MDG	*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* - Ministry of the German-speaking Community
OSU	*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen* - Official Subsidised Education System

PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	Purchasing Power Parities
RdJ	*Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend* - Youth Council of the German-speaking Community
REK	*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept* - Regional development concept
RZKB	*Regionalzentrum fur Kleinkindbetreuung* - Regional centre for early childhood and care
SEN	Special Education Needs
SKE	*Sekretariat des Katholischen Unterrichtswesens* - Secretariat of Catholic Education
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TZU	*Teilzeitunterricht* - Part-time vocational education
UOE	UNESCO OECD Eurostat
VERA	*Vergleichsarbeiten* - Comparative assessments
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WFG	*Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft Ostbelgiens* - Business development agency of the German-speaking Community
WSR	*Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat* - Economic and Social Council
ZAWM	*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes* - Centre for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
ZFP	*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik* - Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy

Executive summary

The German-speaking Community is a small jurisdiction and home to around 12 200 students from the pre-primary to the upper secondary level. Despite its small size, the German-speaking Community has a complex and diversified education landscape, comprised of three distinct school networks. School providers enjoy a high degree of pedagogical autonomy concerning, among others, the methods applied in their schools as well as the recruitment of staff. The principle of "freedom of education" also guarantees parents the right to free school choice. The Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for formulating the Community's education policy and oversees its implementation in all schools. It provides most of the public subsidies for education as well as the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*), describing the competencies students are expected to develop at key stages of primary and secondary education.

Even though schools in the German-speaking Community benefit from significant educational investment and favourable learning conditions, the Community has a relatively small and diminishing share of top-performing students and remains below its potential in international comparison. At age 15, students performed at the OECD average in science and reading and slightly above average in mathematics in 2018, but experienced a drop in reading and science performance compared to 2015. This suggests significant potential for the German-speaking Community to raise students' outcomes further by increasing the effectiveness of its resource allocation. At the same time, the Community has low levels of educational inequality and an above average share of resilient students.

To guide reforms until 2030 and beyond, the German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*) with the goal to raise education quality and equity. Based on the overall vision, which this OECD education policy review is designed to inform, the government intends to develop a Master Plan laying out an implementation strategy for the reforms needed to achieve the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. There is a widespread recognition of the need for further reforms and an impressive range of actors within and outside the school system who are invested in improving education in the German-speaking Community. This high level of engagement can provide a good basis to keep stakeholders closely involved throughout the development of the overall vision and build ownership of the vision and future reforms among teachers, leaders and other stakeholders.

This report offers an independent analysis of the German-speaking Community's school system and assesses the system's strengths and challenges from an international perspective. It focuses in particular on the funding and governance of school education, policies to support equity and inclusion, school leadership and the development of the teaching profession. The report identifies a range of opportunities for the German-speaking Community to build on the strengths of its school system, enhance the effectiveness of its resource use and ensure that the system delivers the best outcomes for all students. The report identifies the following policy priorities:

Leverage the revised core curricula to raise the quality of teaching and learning

The revision of the German-speaking Community's core curricula offers a unique opportunity to carry the goals of the overall vision into the classroom and provide teachers with a shared aspiration for student learning around which they could be supported to collaborate and develop their practice. For this to be the case, the German-speaking Community needs to ensure that the process of developing, revising and implementing the new core curricula is aligned with the development of the *Gesamtvision* and sufficiently inclusive for teachers and other school staff to develop a sense of commitment to them and to ensure their buy-in during the implementation phase. To lead to meaningful changes in the classroom and, it will therefore be important to ensure that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are actively involved in the revision of the core curricula. The most successful examples of curricula reforms in OECD countries have emphasised the importance of teacher agency and approached the revision process as a collaborative "bottom-up" process based on broad stakeholder involvement, rather than a technical task for specialists.

Strengthen the monitoring of performance and resource use in schools

The German-speaking Community should strengthen its data infrastructure and information management system to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools and to promote evidence-based decision making at all levels of the system, from parents and schools to the central administration. In comparison to other OECD countries, the German-speaking Community suffers from limitations to both the availability of data (including comparative benchmarks with other Communities and countries) and the capacity to manage and analyse it. To address these shortcomings, the ministry should develop a central education database covering all schools, teachers and students that would allow the Community to monitor key school characteristics (related to their student body, resources, staffing and performance) as well as students' educational trajectories. To evaluate the equity and efficiency of its school funding system and to detect potential mismatches between schools' resources and their needs, the ministry should also develop a central reporting framework to collect school-level data on revenues and expenditures across all three networks.

In light of limited capacity, the development of indicators and the collection of data needs to be strategic and proceed with a view to support the monitoring of progress towards the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. As the German-speaking Community advances in implementing the *Gesamtvision*, it should consider publishing regular reports with key indicators, which can be an effective way to track the system's progress, increase transparency and accountability and keep the wider public involved once clear objectives and measurable targets have been identified. Given the methodological challenges involved in interpreting data and using it for school improvement purposes, it will be vital to ensure that school leaders are equipped to interpret standardised assessment results correctly and to complement them with other means of monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of learning in schools. To strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its school system, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to consistently evaluate pilot projects, policies and programmes, particularly with respect to equity and inclusiveness.

Place students and their needs at the centre of learning and adopt a broader view of inclusion

Over the years, inclusive education has become a central element of the German-speaking Community's school system and structured support is available for students with special education needs (SEN), newcomer students and gifted students. Placing students at the centre of learning will be key to building on these efforts and developing an even more inclusive education system that supports all students in

mainstream schools according to their individual needs. To move towards this goal, it will be important to adopt a broader view of inclusivity that considers not only the specific needs and challenges of students with special education needs (SEN), newcomer students and gifted students, but all dimensions of student diversity. This would entail a systematically differentiated approach to teaching based on a diagnosis of students' different learning levels and styles. To prepare teachers to respond to each student's needs, inclusion should be integrated into teachers' competence profiles, initial teacher education modules and the continuing professional learning for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff. This could also involve requiring aspiring teachers to complete internships in a special school, in an inclusive school or in a mainstream school with an inclusion teacher.

The German-speaking Community should make it a priority to streamline the provision of support for diverse student groups. Making the procedure for demanding resources for a student with SEN more flexible and less bureaucratic could reduce waiting times and improve system's inclusivity. Schools should be able to draw on different types of support for each student including not only specialised teachers or teaching assistants, but also non-teaching staff. The ability to respond to students' specific needs should be supported by the provision of a pool of materials, accommodations or modifications that can address each student's needs. There is also room to make the language support system more flexible and adapted to serve the needs of students with an immigrant background and specifically newcomer students. Moving towards a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning will require a sustained effort to foster greater collaboration among teachers, which is also critical to implement the Community's competency-oriented core curricula successfully.

Strengthen teachers' professionalism and support their continuing professional growth

The teaching profession will play a pivotal role in ensuring that the reforms guided by the *Gesamtvision* translate into meaningful changes in the classroom and improvements in student learning. In order to strengthen teachers' professionalism, sustainably address teacher shortages, attract talented individuals to the teaching career and sustain their motivation over time, the German-speaking Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and oriented towards continuing professional growth. Recent initiatives and reforms to strengthen leadership teams and improve teachers' support in the early years should be built upon to make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions.

To mobilise the profession for the implementation of the *Gesamtvision*, the Community should co-develop a concise vision statement with the teaching profession that reflects the types of competencies and attitudes that teachers will need to achieve it. In close collaboration with the profession, the German-speaking Community should also develop a set of well-structured professional standards for teachers at different levels of experience. These standards could serve as a reference point to inform the curricula for teachers' initial education, to guide school-level teacher evaluations, support teachers' self-directed professional learning and provide the basis for a transparent, merit-based career ladder.

Creating more opportunities for teachers – not only in secondary education – to assume responsibilities associated with formal career steps would facilitate distributed leadership, incentivise teachers' continuing improvement and ensure that highly effective teachers assume responsibilities in the school community that are concomitant with their skills. This could involve creating roles for middle managers in primary schools above a certain size and adding career steps for senior teachers in secondary schools. Better prospects for career progression could also improve teachers' long-term motivation and raise the profession's attractiveness for top-performing students considering initial teacher education.

To ensure that beginning teachers become effective educators quickly, the German-speaking Community should consider concrete steps to strengthen their continuous support at the school level. Plans to

introduce systematic mentoring support (including training for mentors) should be pursued as an important step in this direction. To raise the quality of teaching, a greater emphasis on effective forms of continuing professional learning (CPL) will be critical. In addition to setting clear expectations for teachers' engagement in professional learning, teachers should be provided with the time and resources needed to pursue both individual as well as collaborative forms of professional learning. To link teachers' professional learning more strongly to their individual development needs and those of the system, their schools and their students, teachers at all levels of experience should engage in regular formative appraisal to discuss their goals and learning needs and create individual professional learning plans to address them.

Strengthen schools' capacity for pedagogical leadership and improvement

In order to successfully implement student-centred curricula, develop schools into learning organisations, and take advantage of schools' pedagogical autonomy, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen school leaders' capacity for pedagogical leadership. Career advancement opportunities for teachers could lead to a more distributed leadership and strengthen schools' ability to engage in continuous self-evaluation and collective school improvement efforts. The Community should refine its leadership training and provide accessible resources to help leaders develop and use multi-year school development plans to advance their "school project", to place the quality of teaching at the centre, and to collect and use relevant data to support the process. Strengthening inter-school collaboration, e.g. by pairing experienced school leaders with less experienced peers, would support this process. In addition to strengthening schools' internal capacity, the Community should continue developing its external support services to assist schools in following-up on evaluation results. To this end, the government should pursue plans to create an institute for school development to facilitate schools' access to external support services and create synergies between them.

Assessment and recommendations

This chapter summarises the main findings and key recommendations of the OECD education policy review of German-speaking Community of Belgium. Following the structure of the report, it focuses first on strengths and challenges concerning the governance of the school system, the use of data to steer education policy and the funding of schools in the Community. The chapter then summarises the key findings related to equity and inclusion, focusing on newcomer students, students with special education needs and gifted students before presenting key strengths and challenges related to the quality of teaching, school leadership and learning environments. The chapter closes with a selection of policy recommendations addressing the challenges identified by the OECD review team. For the full set of strengths and challenges identified by the OECD review team and the corresponding policy recommendations, readers are encouraged to refer to the report's main substantive chapters. The education policy review was undertaken by a team of OECD Secretariat staff and an external expert. The findings presented here take into account a background report prepared by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium; interviews conducted with public officials, institutional representatives and stakeholders during a virtual review visit in May 2021; and the subsequent document review and analysis by the OECD review team.

Context

The school system achieves average to above average outcomes in international assessments but remains below its potential

At age 15, students in the German-speaking Community of Belgium participate in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in mathematics, reading and science. In 2018, students performed above the OECD average in mathematics (505 vs. 489) and at the average in science (483 score points vs. 489) as well as reading (483 vs. 487). Students in the German-speaking Community performed similarly to those in the French Community, but worse than those in the Flemish Community in all three subjects. They scored at the same level (i.e. statistically not distinguishable) as students in France, but fared worse than German students in reading and science and than Dutch students in science and mathematics. Compared to 2015, 15-year-old students in 2018 performed significantly worse in reading and science, losing 18 and 22 score points respectively, while the performance in mathematics remained stable.

The gap between high-performing and low-performing students in the German-speaking Community is narrow, in part due to a small and diminishing share of top-performing students. In 2018, the share of 15-year-old students performing at proficiency Level 5 or above was close to the OECD average in mathematics (9.1% vs. 10.9%) but below the OECD average in reading (5.4% vs. 8.7%) and science (3.2% vs. 6.8%). Since 2006, the share of top-performers has halved in all three domains. While the share of low achievers remains below the OECD average across the three domains of the PISA test, their share has increased in reading and science from around 14% in 2015 to around 20% in 2018. At the same time, the share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who perform among the top 25% of students after accounting for economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) stood at 14.1% (compared to 11.3% on average

across the OECD, 10.7% in the Flemish Community and 7.1% in the French Community), indicating a relatively high level of resilience or educational mobility.

The German-speaking Community's school system is underpinned by a sustained and, at the secondary level, above-average level of educational investment, which allows for favourable learning conditions, including comparatively small class sizes and student-teacher ratios. Per-student expenditure at both the primary and secondary level is above the OECD average (see Chapter 2). In light of the significant resources invested into its school system, it appears as though the German-speaking Community remains below its potential when it comes to translating these inputs into educational outcomes. Some of the OECD's top-performing school systems in Europe, including Estonia, Poland and Ireland report lower levels of investment than the German-speaking Community. Likewise, the Flemish Community of Belgium performs not far from the OECD's top-performers in PISA. This suggests significant potential for the German-speaking Community to raise students' outcomes further by increasing the effectiveness of its resource allocation.

The German-speaking Community is in the process of developing an overall vision to guide reforms in a decentralised education system

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*) to guide reforms until 2030 and beyond in order to improve education quality and equity. The development of the vision will be informed by a bottom-up diagnosis of the system's challenges based on stakeholder perspectives, which was completed in early 2020, as well as the OECD's education policy review, which provides a complementary analyses and recommendations from an international perspective. Based on the overall vision, the government intends to develop a Master Plan in 2023, laying out an implementation strategy for the reforms needed to achieve the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*, accompanied by indicators to measure progress towards them.

The German-speaking Community's schools are organised in three networks: the Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW), which includes public pre-primary, primary and secondary schools funded and run directly by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research of the German-speaking Community; the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU) run by the nine municipalities, which covers 52 of the 57 primary school sites and most pre-primary schools; and the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU), which includes the publicly subsidised private schools, all of which are currently run by the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools (*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, BSDG). Education in the three Belgian Communities is subject to the principle of "freedom of education", which means that parents are free to select a school of their choice and are guaranteed a place for their child as long as they meet the general admissions criteria.

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for formulating the Community's education policy and oversees its implementation in all schools. It provides most of the public subsidies for education and validates schools' curricula. In addition, the Minister of Education and Scientific Research assumes responsibilities as a school provider (*Schulträger*) of the Community schools. The school providers (the minister in the case of GUW schools, the municipalities in the case OSU schools and the BSDG in the case of FSU schools) are responsible for approving their schools' curricula, for the pedagogical methods applied in their schools, for the recruitment of staff and for the organisation of learning.

Strengths and challenges

The development of an overall vision has the potential to provide the education system with clear goals to guide and lend coherence to reform initiatives

Establishing clear goals and an understanding of core values is key to guiding policy improvements in school systems that are as complex and decentralised as the German-speaking Community. Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019[1]) and the government's working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP). While both documents list a series of reform projects for the education sector and an envisaged timeline for their implementation, the Community lacks a widely known, clearly articulated vision for the education system. Widely recognised visions and overarching goals can strengthen school systems' capacity to lend coherence and direction to reform processes and mobilise actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations for the education system. They can also give stakeholders certainty about the direction of reforms and made it easier to communicate the rationale of planned initiatives.

The development of the overall vision (the *Gesamtvision*) provides the government with an important opportunity to fill this gap. The overall vision could allows to formulate clear goals for the education system, strengthen coherence across different reform areas, sequence and prioritise the significant number of reform processes that have been planned or initiated, and sustain the focus on long-term objectives. It could also help to create synergies between the revision and implementation of the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*), as well as reforms related to school leadership and teaching, the core curricula, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation. An overall vision could also align initiatives developed at the central level with bottom-up planning and school improvement efforts at the local level.

Reforming the policy framework of the teaching and school leadership professions has been a priority for the German-speaking Community since in 2015 when the "good personnel for good schools" initiative (*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen*, GPGS) started a process to modernise and simplify the teacher service code. The reform initiative's scope was wide-ranging, including topics such as teachers' recruitment and career structure, their professional development and working conditions. Following a stakeholder consultation, it was agreed for the reforms to be embedded in the development of the *Gesamtvision*. This is an important strategic choice as it allows to align the reforms with the German-speaking Community's overall goals for the school system and to create synergies across policy areas. It will also help in creating a clear narrative around the reform's goals that speaks to teachers, leaders and other stakeholders alike.

The limited availability of data on educational performance and resources reduces transparency and makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate quality and equity

In comparison to other OECD countries, both the availability of data on educational quality and the capacity to analyse it at the central and school level are limited in the German-speaking Community. In contrast to most OECD countries, the German-speaking Community does not use standardised central examinations with formal consequence for students at the upper secondary level. Instead, students participate in a number of standardised assessments without stakes. This includes comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8), as well as international standardised assessments, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year-olds' performance in mathematics, science and reading, and tests for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF). In contrast to the French and Flemish Communities, the German-speaking Community does not participate in international comparative assessments at the primary level (e.g. the TIMSS and PIRLS assessments of 4th grade students in mathematics, science and reading).

Although school leaders and teachers appear to recognise the value of standardised assessment, their capacity to use the results to drive school and system-level improvement could be strengthened. Besides the results of standardised assessments, very little data on educational performance and other relevant concepts is available, even at the central level, and the scope for international benchmarking is limited. For example, no data is collected on individual students' performance, school-leaving qualifications or socio-economic background, the incidence of grade repetition, average class sizes, or the number of vacant staff positions across the school network. Likewise, the Community does not have a data infrastructure in place that would allow for the longitudinal analysis of students' pathways across primary and secondary education or a systematic data collection on school-to-work transitions. The lack of a central education database also makes it difficult for the ministry to relate school performance results to data on school characteristics such as their financial resources, staffing, or social composition. Strengthening this evidence base would be an important condition for monitoring equity and efficiency in the school system more continuously. It would also help to increase transparency and accountability and to enable parents to make more informed choices about their children's education.

The relative lack of disaggregated data and gaps in the systems monitoring and evaluation system raises particular challenges for the support of disadvantaged students and diversity. In general, educational outcomes and well-being are not systematically monitored in a disaggregated manner for a variety of diverse students. Doing so would support policy makers' ability to differentiate between different groups of students and help them develop targeted policies and practices. Data collections should be disaggregated by relevant dimensions, not only based on gender and potential special education needs, but also based on their immigrant status or other individual characteristics where allowed by the legal system. The trade-off between privacy concerns and the system's ability to collect data to monitor sensitive student outcomes in order to better respond to their needs should be taken into account when designing monitoring systems. A further challenge is that policies, programmes and projects on inclusive education are rarely evaluated. This makes it challenging to highlight effective programmes and pilot projects and to scale them up across the Community.

The main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage

A key concern in the design of school funding mechanisms is to ensure that resources are allocated equitably. Providing high-quality education to students with certain characteristics or schools in specific contexts may require more resources than it does to provide the same quality of education for another student in another school. The German-speaking Community shows relatively low levels of educational inequality. It provides some funding for language classes of immigrant students and schools can request additional staff resources, for example to support students with special education needs. Nevertheless, the German-speaking Community is an outlier among OECD countries in that its main funding allocation mechanisms for staff resources and schools' operating grants do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage at the student or school level. Additional analyses and careful monitoring would be needed to evaluate whether the level of resources allocated for students with SEN and newly arrived immigrant students is sufficient and whether they reach the schools and students most in need of additional support (see Chapter 3). It is unusual, however, that no compensatory funding is provided for disadvantaged students in the German-speaking Community who do not belong to these groups.

A range of efforts are undertaken to prevent school failure and facilitate students' transitions, but repetition rates remain high and career guidance could be strengthened

The German-speaking Community recognises the importance of addressing school failure and facilitating students' successful transitions across levels of education and into the labour market. A range of initiatives and educational offers have been developed to prevent drop-out and provide students who are struggling

to complete regular schooling with alternative pathways to educational and professional opportunities. This includes part-time vocational education, the supervision offered by the Time-Out centre, and the one-year pre-vocational programme offered by the ZAWM Centre for Training and Continuing Education. Despite important efforts, the rate of grade repetition also remains high. PISA 2018 data suggests that, among 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school, compared to the OECD average of 11.4%.

Providing strong guidance for students is particularly important in a stratified system like that of the German-speaking Community, where students are streamed into separate tracks at the beginning of secondary education, typically at age 12. Although students have the option to switch pathways as they progress through the school system, tracking can have the unintended consequence of creating a hierarchy among educational pathways and stigmatising the attendance of the vocationally oriented stream. Due to data limitations, the de facto permeability of the system and the number of students who successfully transition between pathways is also difficult to gauge.

A wide range of initiatives in the German-speaking Community bring together actors from education institutions, businesses, the ministry, private and public agencies to provide students with career guidance. This offer is critical to help students navigate difficult choices about their future careers and develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future based on their interests and talents. Nevertheless, ensuring that this relevant information reaches the students that need it the most remains a challenge since students' participation in career orientation activities largely depends on their own initiative. A 2021 survey suggests that only 12% of graduates had obtained career advice through information events and individual counselling, respectively, which suggests that a large part of the student population does not take advantage of these offers. At the same time, in-school career guidance is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions.

Inclusion is seen as a priority by all stakeholders and recent reforms are going in the right direction but there is a narrow understanding of what inclusive education means

Inclusive education is growing to become a central element of the German-speaking Community's school system and different stakeholders recognise its importance for students. Over the years, the Community has built a structured support system, in particular for students with special education needs (SEN), newcomer students and gifted students. To support students with SEN, the Community relies on a combination of high-threshold support, "grade protection" and special accommodations through low-threshold support and the "compensation of disadvantage" (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description). The support system emphasises flexibility and tailoring support to each student who requires help, regardless of their diagnosis. Moreover, the expertise and knowledge developed in special schools is progressively being mobilised to support mainstream schools, which are now the primary education settings for most students with SEN. The quality of inclusion and individualisation of support measures is further strengthened by the fact that many classes in the German-speaking Community are small and distances are short.

Besides students with SEN, the Germany-speaking Community provides structured support to newcomer students in the area of language learning in order to ensure that they have the linguistic means to integrate academically and socially. In pre-primary education, language acquisition takes place in the first two years using the immersion principle, which teaches the language of instruction through play. In primary school, eligible students from the age of five (third year of pre-primary and primary school) can either attend language learning courses or a language learning class four days a week. In secondary education, three schools offer language learning classes. These classes each receive resources for 30 hours of teaching for up to 12 newcomer students. More teaching time is granted for language classes with more than 12 newcomer students.

Another group of students receiving specific support are gifted students, who have increasingly become a priority in the German-speaking Community of Belgium since 2018. Even though the ministry uses a broader definition of giftedness, support has so far been focused on the group of gifted students that show high intellectual potential. The Community's schools use a number of pedagogical strategies to support gifted students, including individualisation through internal differentiation, acceleration, enrichment and grouping. The Community's structured support system around giftedness not only addresses students, but also their schools and teachers. Schools can receive support in the form of advice when developing and implementing internal school projects for the support of gifted children. Moreover, teachers involved in the implementation of these school projects can receive information and further support from the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP).

Although external evaluations show that students in the German-speaking Community learn to perceive and accept diversity as a natural part of school life, the focus on inclusion lies mostly on students with SEN, with some focus also on newcomer students and gifted students. Other diverse groups of students who may need additional support are not considered to a great extent. This narrow understanding of inclusion corresponds to a limited use of practices, tools and methods to promote inclusion in schools, including the use of differentiation and formative student assessment. The limited use of these techniques can also contribute to higher levels of grade repetition since students may fall through the cracks. Grade repetition often particularly affects vulnerable students the most and undermines their inclusion in schools. Furthermore, the school system and out-of-school care (*außerschulische Betreuung*, AUBE) are not well integrated, which may further limit the support available to all students.

Teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff in the German-speaking Community do not seem well prepared to teach students with some types of special education needs while reporting greater confidence in dealing with other disorders. Even though a number of trainings and professional learning opportunities are offered in the area of SEN, they are not offered regularly enough. This is also the case in the area of professional learning for students with autism. This is in line with a previous study, which found teachers to feel particularly under-prepared to support students with autism as well as those with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, most training and professional learning does not seem to cover broader areas of diversity, equity and inclusion such as multiculturalism and supporting newcomer students and other diverse students.

The support system for students with special education needs and newcomers can be rigid and would benefit from greater coherence in the identification of students' needs

Despite the support available for students with special education needs in the German-speaking Community, the system can be overly bureaucratic and rigid. If a child or young person may need special education support (i.e. if general educational measures in the classroom are no longer sufficient), a request for an "integration project" is initiated through Kaleido. The request must be made in writing by the parents or guardian or by the principal of the mainstream school. If the mainstream school wants to initiate the procedure, the parents or guardian must agree. The principal of the mainstream school can contact the Support Conference, if those responsible for the student do not agree. The application must be submitted by 1 February at the latest for special education support to be provided in a mainstream or special school from the following school year. This application process seems quite lengthy and students may need to wait for nearly a year to receive support since there appears to be only one deadline to apply for support.

The German-speaking Community's SEN support system also suffers from a lack of clarity and coherence around its approach to defining and classifying students' special educational needs. While the system does not aim at grouping students to assign them support measures, it still categorises them in different ways. First, the system still incorporates the five groups of different needs (learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, developmental delays, socio-emotional and medical issues), each of which is eligible for specific support measures. Although certain disorders can fall in more than one group, which grants some

flexibility, it is not clear how the groups contribute to the efficiency of the support system or the process of identifying students' needs.

Second, there is a clear distinction between the types of support measures offered to students with SEN, gifted students and newcomer students. Newcomer students almost exclusively receive language support, even though some of the support offered to students with SEN could be generalised and adapted to newcomer students too. This includes, for example, the use of individual learning plans and the provision of low-threshold support to help them catch up with their peers. A more universal and inclusive approach could make these interventions more accessible and reduce the need for separate systems and rules governing the support for distinct groups of students. A more inclusive approach to pedagogy and support measures would also make the system more adaptive and prepared for future social changes.

The education system recognises the importance of multilingualism

Research shows that multilingualism is associated with cognitive, social, personal, academic and professional benefits. Children exposed to more than one language tend to perform better at school than their monolingual peers. In the German-speaking Community, multilingualism is seen as a strength and source of potential for the education system. German is the language of instruction in all schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, except in the French-language school in Eupen (ECEF) and in primary schools where French-speaking sections have been set up to cater to the French-speaking minority. The first foreign language is usually French, except for the French-speaking sections in primary schools, where German is the first foreign language.

Students start learning their first foreign language during their pre-primary education. This early immersion in a foreign language is a strength of the German-speaking Community's school system. From the first year of primary school, the first foreign language is a compulsory subject with a minimum of two hours per week, which progressively increases up to at least five hours by the sixth grade. In primary education, the subjects of art, music and sport can also be taught in the first foreign language. In addition to the pilot project at the pre-primary level, at the secondary level, teaching in a foreign language can be expanded to the subjects of mathematics, geography, history and science and account for a maximum of 40% of the total teaching time. In general secondary education, students need to receive at least four lessons of French-language instruction per week. In technical and vocational secondary education, students are taught French for at least two lessons per week.

While the level of foreign language proficiency reached by students appears to vary across schools and different parts of the Community, the overall objective should be for all to reach sufficient competency in the foreign language to enable them to communicate with their fellow Belgian citizens, to participate fully in society and to study in their own country. Furthermore, besides achieving proficiency in both German and French, there are also demands among stakeholders to promote English language skills further in order to foster a truly multilingual Community.

There have already been encouraging efforts to make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions, but further reforms are needed

School principals' reports suggest that the German-speaking Community faces considerable shortages of teaching staff. In the PISA 2018 survey, two thirds (66%) of 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal believed that teacher shortages hindered its capacity to provide instruction to some extent or a lot (compared to the OECD average of just 27.1%). Likewise, almost half of the 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal reported that instruction was hindered by inadequate or poorly qualified teaching staff in 2018 – the highest proportion among participating OECD jurisdictions. In light of the significant staff shortages raising the attractiveness of a career in schools is an important policy objective for the German-speaking Community.

In recent years, several encouraging efforts have been undertaken and there remains a political commitment to pursue further reforms that make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions. In order to improve the job security of beginning teachers, a new type of temporary open-ended contract was created to absolve fully qualified teachers from reapplying for their positions on an annual basis until they obtain a permanent post. In addition, the creation of middle manager and subject team leader roles in secondary education has created new career opportunities for teachers while strengthening school capacity and reducing the burden on school leaders. Further measures aimed at increasing the attractiveness of working in schools included raising school leaders' salaries in the 2021/22 school year, the introduction of head secretaries in primary education and the introduction of pre-primary assistants to support the work of pre-primary teachers. These initiatives and reforms constitute important steps in the right direction should be built upon. In order to continue attracting promising candidates to pursue a career in schools and retain its best teachers, the Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and motivating throughout the entire career.

The support that beginning teachers receive at the school level constitutes an important area for further improvement. The transition from initial education to primary and secondary teaching is a critical stage in preparing teachers and helping them to be effective in the classroom, particularly if many teachers enter the profession with limited pedagogical training. While the *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (AHS) – the German-speaking Community's higher education institution – offers a two-year induction programme consisting of regular meeting for secondary, primary and pre-primary teachers to learn from one another during their first years on the job, there is no systematic support at the school level. Effective induction programmes of sufficient duration and intensity, including pedagogical coaching and direct feedback, can have a strong positive impact on beginning teachers. This type of support is best provided closer to the teacher, in a format that allows for continuous, hands-on and more contextualised support to help new teachers address the day-to-day challenges they encounter in their schools. The OECD review team has seen examples of schools providing mentorship programmes for beginning teachers and plans to provide more systematic support for these practices could be an important step in the right direction.

Further efforts are also needed to provide teachers' with opportunities for professional growth in order to maintain their long-term motivation and mobilise their growing expertise to contribute to leadership and school improvement processes. At the secondary level, the introduction of the middle manager role constituted an important step towards strengthening leadership teams and providing teachers with formal leadership responsibilities and increased remuneration. The role of subject team leaders (*Fachteamleiter*), while not remunerated, also constitutes a step in the right direction by recognising the ability of experienced teachers to share their knowledge and co-ordinate teachers' collaboration to raise the quality of teaching in their schools. Beyond this, however, opportunities for career advancement within the classroom remain very limited, especially in pre-primary and primary schools where no selection positions exist. Although school leaders in the German-speaking Community can create some degree of job differentiation by giving teachers special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) in exchange for reduced teaching hours, these are temporary and not associated with clear competency profiles or a formal career progression leading to further opportunities to assume leadership. This absence of a merit-based career structure providing opportunities for ongoing professional advancement based on teachers' observed performance risks reducing the attractiveness of a career in schools.

The Community's core curricula are critical for high-quality education, but teachers feel little ownership over them and are not sufficiently involved in their revision

The German-speaking Community is in the process of revising its core curricula. This offers a unique opportunity to provide teachers with a shared aspiration for student learning around which they could be supported to further develop their practice and collaborate. Research suggests that curricula that afford more decision-making freedom to schools – such as the German-speaking Community's – may offer less guidance to teachers but tend to be more sustainable in the long run, provided that school leaders and

teachers understand the principles underlying the curriculum and build capacity to teach accordingly. Participating in ongoing school and curriculum development activities could also provide a good context for continuing professional learning and for fostering teachers' sense of belonging to a recognised profession. For this to be the case, however, the German-speaking Community needs to ensure that the process of developing, revising and implementing the new core curricula is sufficiently inclusive for teachers and other school staff to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to them. As it stands, professional ownership of the core curricula is low. Few of the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team appeared to see the core curricula as a useful instrument and reference to guide their professional practice. Ensuring that teachers are actively involved in the revision of the core curricula at the school level will therefore be critical to ensure their successful implementation (see Chapter 2).

School-wide training days are an important investment but teachers' engagement in other forms of collaborative professional learning remains limited

Continuing professional learning (CPL) is vital for teachers to refresh, develop and broaden their knowledge, and to keep up with changing research, tools and practices to respond to students' needs. The evolving context of learning and teaching in the German-speaking Community will continue to place new demands on teachers, such as the development of school-based curricula or providing differentiated teaching to increasingly diverse learners. To equip teachers to meet these challenges, the German-speaking Community needs to make continuing professional learning a key element in its vision for the teaching profession and strengthen its support for continuing professional growth at all stages of the teacher career. This is particularly vital for a system with a large number of teachers who enter the profession with minimal pedagogical training or completed their initial teacher education outside the Community.

Schools in the German-speaking Community can choose three to four days a year to dedicate to the professional learning of all of their teaching and support staff. The release time dedicated to these training days constitutes a significant investment in teachers' professional learning and provides an opportunity for all staff to receive co-ordinated training or discuss and contribute to school development plans in a collective setting. To achieve sustained, cumulative and quality professional learning as a basis for effective teaching, whole-school events need to be complemented with activities that allow teachers – on their own or in groups – to transfer and assimilate new ideas into their classroom practice. Yet, although the AHS offers a range of professional development courses, teachers' participation in continuing professional learning is low in international comparison, particularly when it comes to school-based, collaborative forms of learning.

A number of factors may contribute to teachers' low level of engagement in professional learning. Participation plays a marginal role in the teacher recruitment process, opportunities for career advancement are limited and professional learning is only weakly linked to teachers' appraisal process. In the absence of central requirements, there are few incentives for teachers to engage in professional development beyond the school-wide training days, at least once teachers have obtained a permanent or open-ended fixed-term contract. Participation in professional learning then largely depends on teachers' individual motivation and the OECD review team formed the impression that there was a lack of clear expectations around teachers' professional learning.

In addition to the limited incentives, there is little structural support for teachers' engagement in sustained and collaborative CPL beyond the school-wide training days. In many successful school systems, time is made available to ensure that professional learning is a normal part of daily work life in schools. In the German-speaking Community, teachers do not have the right to a given amount of individual professional learning and there is no time, besides the whole-school training days, that is explicitly set aside in their schedules to engage in learning activities with their peers. School leaders cited their difficulties in freeing up time for teachers to attend external CPL opportunities, following up on them and creating conditions for

teachers to team teach or observe each other. This means that even motivated teachers may find it difficult to take part in professional learning, especially if their school suffers from staff shortages.

Research suggests that the most effective forms of professional learning involve continuous, school-based formats that are embedded in teachers' everyday work, rather than the external, one-off courses and linear modes of provision that predominate in the German-speaking Community. Regardless of its format, for professional learning to be effective, it needs to be responsive to the needs of schools, individual teachers and, ultimately, their students. Linking teachers' professional learning to their regular formative appraisal can be an effective strategy to accomplish this goal. In the German-speaking Community, there is still scope to make more use of teachers' formative evaluations as a tool for professional growth by linking it to individual goal-setting and professional learning opportunities. Formative appraisal is currently not mandatory and rarely carried out for teachers on permanent contracts. As a consequence, few schools practice a culture of regular feedback and teachers' choice of professional learning activities is mainly guided by their personal interests and not always centred on improving teaching or their school's development goals.

School autonomy has the potential to foster pedagogical diversity and innovation, but requires further capacity building at the school level

Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a high degree of autonomy. School providers are free to decide on the pedagogical methods used in their schools, as well as their choice of student assessment practices. Each school also has wide-ranging autonomy in their implementation of the core curricula, the use of their staff, as well as the organisation of instruction, including the course offer and class sizes. Combined with free school choice, this autonomy has the potential to incentivise local innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches in the Community. The structure of the Community's school network and its strong geographical coverage, particularly at the primary level, also creates the potential for a high responsiveness to the characteristics and needs of local communities. The autonomy of schools and school providers provides them with a good basis to tailor their profiles to local needs. However, whether school choice and a diversity of providers leads to innovation and a better match between the educational offer and local needs in practice, depends on a variety of factors, notably the capacity of school leadership. To capitalise on these opportunities, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen the capacity of schools and school providers.

School leaders require more support to engage in pedagogical leadership and use their autonomy to improve educational quality

School leaders play a pivotal role in elevating the quality of teaching and learning in the German-speaking Community's and in ensuring that reforms result in improvements in the classroom. They are critical for shaping their school's pedagogical profile by implementing the new core curricula and in creating an environment in which teachers continuously improve their competencies to support student learning. The successful exercise of pedagogical leadership demands taking an active role in the school's self-evaluation and improvement efforts, in developing school-based curricula in pursuit of the school's educational project, in observing teachers in the classroom and supporting staff in their continuing professional learning to respond to the evolving needs of their students. The recent reform of school leaders' salaries and the introduction of new support roles at the primary level have been important steps to make the principals' role more attractive. Nevertheless, the OECD review team identified multiple challenges that need to be addressed for school leaders to exercise their role as effectively as they could. A relatively low level of preparation, training and support, combined with school leaders' limited autonomy in some areas of school management reduce the attractiveness of their role, which makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified and motivated individuals to the school leadership career. These challenges are described in more detail in the following.

First, school leaders have few opportunities to gain relevant experience prior to assuming their positions and some feel insufficiently prepared for their new roles. Building school leaders' capacity starts requires a strong system of preparation and continuing development. This will be even more important for the German-speaking Community going forward since dropping the requirement for school leaders to hold a teaching certificate means that lateral entrants into the profession may that have neither the expertise, nor the perceived legitimacy to provide instructional leadership when assuming their roles. For many principals, learning happens mostly on the job. The limited opportunities for teachers to gain prior experience in intermediary leadership roles may contribute to these difficulties, as does the absence of mentorship structures that would allow experienced school leaders to support new colleagues.

Second, school leadership in the German-speaking Community is not sufficiently distributed and lack the structural support to pursue their pedagogical leadership role effectively. Although the creation of Middle Managers in secondary schools and head secretaries in primary schools can be expected to bring improvements, school leaders, still receive relatively little structural support in the form of an extended leadership team that could alleviate their administrative burden and assume shared responsibility for key aspects of school improvement. At the primary level, school leaders have no personnel supporting them in their leadership responsibilities, which is particularly problematic for leaders of larger primary schools and can contribute to a sense of professional isolation. As a consequence, the OECD's interviews suggested that – despite their expressed desire to engage in pedagogical leadership – school leaders find too little time to support their teachers' development, for example by engaging in regular lesson observation and providing feedback.

Third, there is a need to build further capacity for schools' self-evaluation and to strengthen synergies between the inspectorate, the external evaluation and support services. Since 2009, the German-speaking Community has made significant progress in fostering school improvement by introducing regular internal and external school evaluations. Nevertheless, according to external evaluations, many schools show deficits when it comes to their self-evaluation process and school improvement cycle. School leaders require further support to select evaluation areas that are aligned with their school project (interview partners pointed to a deficit-oriented approach to school evaluations prevailing in many schools), to place teachers' professional learning and the quality of teaching at the centre of their school project and development plans, and to actively build on evaluation results in the process. Although there have been efforts to generate awareness of the importance of school development, not all schools embrace the external evaluation process as a tool for school improvement and effectively followed up on evaluation results. To address this challenge, the Community will need to further strengthen the capacity and build synergies between the inspectorate, the external evaluation and additional support services, including the school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*) the AHS' pedagogical advisory services (*Fachberatungen*).

Finally, although school leaders in the German-speaking Community enjoy significant autonomy over the pedagogical orientation of their schools, they leaders have limited control over key aspects of school management, including the recruitment of teachers, which reduces their ability to develop talent and create a good match between the staff and the schools' pedagogical project. School leaders in the GUW and OSU networks are required to select teachers using a point-based ranking system (*Klassierung*) based on a limited number of criteria that privilege experience and formal qualifications but do not include interviews, letters of motivation or trial lessons, which could provide more evidence of teachers' performance, motivation and their fit with the schools' profile. This significantly reduces school leaders' ability to exercise professional judgement and autonomy in the selection of teachers. The decentralised nature of the teacher recruitment process and lack of a unified service code gives rise to inefficiencies, limits teachers' mobility and creates uncertainty for both teachers and schools. Each of the three school networks (and, in the case of the OSU network, each municipality) organise their own teacher recruitment process, applying slightly different selection and eligibility criteria. The differences in teachers' service codes across providers have

created obstacles for synergies, such as the creation of a shared pool of substitute teachers, and reduce teachers' mobility between networks (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion).

Policy recommendations

Use the development of the Gesamtvision to provide a renewed vision for the education system, strategic guidance for reforms and a basis for an actionable implementation strategy

The development of the overall vision for the education system (the *Gesamtvision*) presents a unique opportunity to drive reforms that will shape the German-speaking Community's education system for the years to come. It has the potential to build a shared understanding of the system's overarching goals and underpinning values, identify the most important challenges that the system needs to address, point to a coherent set of policy options to achieve the system's goals and provide a basis for an actionable implementation strategy (the *Master Plan* to be developed in 2023). For the *Gesamtvision* to successfully guide, prioritise and lend coherence to education reforms and to serve as a foundation for an implementation strategy that will lead to tangible improvements in the classrooms, it will need to be well-designed with these goals in mind.

To develop an effective strategy document, the *Gesamtvision* should articulate a clear vision for the system. Such a vision statement could provide the overarching rationale for the development of the strategy, guide the selection of focus areas for reforms, align policy actions and help to mobilise the various actors in the system around a shared aspiration. To fulfil this function, the vision statement should be concise and focus on a small number of key aspirations, which may be underpinned by a commitment to a set of high-level values that the system seeks to embody or impart. Successful vision statements are frequently developed through a process of wide-ranging consultations or co-development, in order to secure the ownership of the stakeholders they concern.

Furthermore, the *Gesamtvision* will need to identify the system's most important challenges, formulate specific goals, and propose policy actions to accomplish them in order to provide a strong basis for an actionable implementation strategy. To ensure coherence across the goals formulated across the different policy areas covered by the *Gesamtvision*, they should be aligned with the overarching vision for the education system and a narrative that explains their selection. The successful implementation of the Community's revised core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) would be one such objective that will require a whole-of-system approach and synergies across a number of policy areas, including, but not limited to, teachers' professional learning, school leadership and the evaluation system (see Chapter 4). Bringing about the conditions to implement a new curriculum successfully is one example of a narrative that could help to link the Community's high-level objectives and the specific goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. The development of the *Gesamtvision* and the revision of the core curricula should therefore be closely aligned.

To make the *Gesamtvision* actionable, it should associate the identified challenges and goals with specific policy actions to address them. The description of policy actions should include a causal narrative explaining how specific measures are expected to contribute to realising the associated goals. Reforms that are already planned or underway should be aligned with the development of the *Gesamtvision* in the process. This concerns, for example, the ongoing revision of teacher competency frameworks as well as, most importantly, the development and implementation of the revised core curricula, which should be seen an important opportunity to bring the aspirations formulated in the overall vision to life and into the classroom. The creation of the Master Plan in 2023 should aim to operationalise the overall vision's goals and link them to measurable indicators to track progress towards their attainment. Supplementing the Master Plan with effective indicators will require the Community to develop a corresponding strategy for

data collection (see below). An effective implementation strategy may also include a description of follow-up actions and mechanisms to adjust policies if the progress is inadequate.

The German-speaking Community has already involved a wide range of relevant stakeholders during the first two diagnostic phases informing the *Gesamtvision* and it should continue doing so throughout the development and the implementation of its vision. During its stakeholder interviews, the OECD review team witnessed an impressive range of actors within and outside the school system who are invested in improving education in the German-speaking Community. This high level of engagement can provide a good basis to keep stakeholders closely involved throughout the development of the *Gesamtvision*. Innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement taken by other OECD countries, such as Finland's Education Experimentation Lab (see Chapter 2), can offer inspiration and opportunities for mutual learning. In addition to lending coherence to reform processes and mobilising actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations, a widely recognised vision and overarching goals can also give stakeholders certainty about the direction of reforms, make it easier to communicate the rationale of planned initiatives and reduce the risk of reform fatigue. This will be important to build ownership of the vision and the reforms derived from its implementation among teachers, leaders and other stakeholders.

Align the revision of the core curricula with the development of the Gesamtvision and bring teachers on board for their successful implementation

As described above, the revision of the core curricula can be an important lever to advance the overall vision for the German-speaking Community's education system, provided that core curricula's revision is aligned with the goals formulated for the education system more widely. To fulfil this role, the timeline for the revision of the core curricula should be adjusted to permit their alignment with the overarching vision formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Many of the policy options identified in this report would facilitate the implementation of the revised core curricula and vice versa. An emphasis on differentiated teaching and student guidance in the curricula, for example, could promote equity and facilitate inclusive education (see Chapter 3). In turn, a reform of teachers' working conditions and their professional learning as well as efforts to strengthen pedagogical leadership would help to create the collaborative environment in schools in which competency-based curricula can come to fruition (see Chapter 4). The revision and implementation of the core curricula is therefore intricately connected with the success of the overall vision and should be pursued in tandem to create synergies between them.

The core curricula's adaptation into school-based curricula has the potential to make them more relevant to the local context and thus more engaging for students, but it also requires teachers and school leaders to take responsibility for shaping the curricula. Without a sense of ownership among the profession, no curriculum – regardless of its design and content – will live up to its promise and affect meaningful changes in the classroom. In order to foster this professional ownership and ensure teachers' buy-in during the implementation phase, it is critical that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are strongly engaged in the development and revision of curricula, from the beginning.

As it stands, teachers' involvement in the revision of core curricula is limited. The most successful examples of curricula reforms in OECD countries have emphasised the importance of teacher agency and approached the revision process as a collaborative "bottom-up" process based on broad stakeholder involvement, rather than a technical task for specialists. Reforms in systems like Wales, New Zealand and Ontario (Canada) offer instructive examples in this regard (see Chapter 4). The German-speaking Community should, ensure that teachers' input is guiding the curricula's revision from the very start and that teachers' involvement at the school level is of sufficient intensity, involving structured discussions and professional exchange. Achieving teachers' buy-in will also require authorities to demonstrate a credible long-term commitment to the new curricula. The curricula should therefore be designed to be broad and general enough to ensure their long-term relevance and flexible enough to allow schools to adapt them to emerging needs over time.

Explore the introduction of equity funding to compensate for schools' and students' disadvantage

Allocating additional resources to schools that are most in need of support is an important means to promote vertical equity. Compensating schools for additional resource needs that may arise from factors related to the socio-economic composition of their student body is also likely to raise efficiency by directing resources to where they have the biggest impact. The German-speaking Community should therefore explore introducing equity funding, for example by adding weights to the student-based formula used to allocate staff resources or to the formula used to calculate the operating grants of FSU and OSU schools (an equivalent mechanism would need to be developed for GUW schools).

A considerable number of OECD countries compensate for the greater financial needs of disadvantaged schools using index-based weightings in their main allocation mechanisms. Different forms of index-based equity funding are used in the Netherlands, England (United Kingdom), France, Australia, New Zealand as well as different parts of the United States, Switzerland and Canada. The indicators used to distribute equity funding in the Flemish Community of Belgium and some federal states in Germany provide further opportunities for peer learning (see Chapter 2).

The introduction of equity funding relies on the availability suitable data on students' socio-economic background or needs whose collection may be facilitated by the German-speaking Community's introduction of a new school-level data management system. First, however, it will be important, to reach an agreement on the concept of inequality or disadvantage that a social index should reflect, as well as a suitable set of indicators and weightings that could be used to construct it. The search of appropriate indicators should be an integral part of the data development strategy discussed in the following.

Consider simplifying funding mechanisms and creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public school networks

In order to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools and central authorities and to provide greater clarity over funding streams, the German-speaking Community should consider whether there is scope for streamlining its funding mechanisms. Particularly in the OSU and FSU networks, schools receive resources through a variety of per-capita earmarked funding streams with overlapping and sometimes unclear purposes. In addition to their operating grant, they receive per-student funding intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contribution. In practice, funding allocated through all three of these mechanisms can be used for similar purposes. While this gives school leaders additional flexibility in the use of these funds, it is difficult to justify the administrative burden that monitoring the use of this earmarked funding would require in theory. The Germans-speaking Community should therefore consider the advantages of distributing this funding through a single allocation mechanism. Some schools in the German-speaking Community also struggle with the administrative burden of submitting individual requests to cover expenses on school equipment, for additional contract staff (BVA), school projects or lunch break supervision. In order to could free up capacity and reduce delays, the Community should consider whether these is scope for integrating some of this funding into schools' regular budget for operating expenses and giving them greater discretion in its management.

For a school system of its size, the German-speaking Community's historical division into three distinct school networks creates a high level of complexity and the split of responsibilities for public primary schools across two levels of administration further complicates the picture. At the time of the review, three public primary schools were part of the GUW network under the authority of the minister while all other public primary schools were part of the OSU network and managed by their respective municipalities. The German-speaking Community should consider reforming this governance arrangement with a view to simplify the network structure and explore whether municipalities should be the exclusive provider of public primary schools. Consolidating the authority over public primary schools in the OSU network could have a

number of advantages. Across OECD countries, it is not uncommon for local authorities to be closely involved in the management or supervision of primary schools, given that most students at this level live near their schools and local authorities are thought to be in an advantageous position to identify and respond to local needs as they arise. Absolving the minister from overseeing schools at two distinct levels of education could allow a more efficient use of limited administrative capacity. In addition, creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public networks could facilitate the co-ordination between public primary schools whose structures currently exclude the GUW network's primary schools. Lastly, it would ensure that all public primary schools are funded based on the same funding mechanism.

Strengthen the system's data collection in line with the Gesamtvision and Master Plan, monitor student performance and equity and consistently evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices, particularly in the area of inclusion

The German-speaking Community should strengthen its data infrastructure and information management system to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools and to promote evidence-based decision making at all levels of the system, from parents and schools to the central administration. In comparison to other OECD countries, the German-speaking Community suffers from limitations to both the availability of data (including comparative benchmarks with other Communities and countries) and the capacity to manage and analyse it. To address these shortcomings, the ministry should develop a central education database covering all schools, teachers and students that would allow the Community to monitor key school characteristics (related to their student body, resources, staffing and performance) as well as students' educational trajectories.

A central information management system should be designed with multiple purposes in mind. It could help schools manage their data and make informed decisions to better support their students in collaboration with external sources of support. It could also provide a much-needed basis for authorities to identify opportunities to make better use of resources to advance educational quality and equity. At the same time, it would improve transparency and strengthen schools' accountability towards education authorities, parents and other stakeholders. As the German-speaking Community advances towards the realisation of its *Gesamtvision* it should consider to regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective way to track the system's progress and keep the wider public involved once clear objectives and measurable targets have been identified. In light of the German-speaking Community's limited capacity, the development of indicators and the collection of data needs to be strategic and proceed with a view to support the monitoring of progress towards the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*.

Systematically collecting data on students' needs and the social composition of schools is also an important precondition to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage and monitor inequities across the system. In addition to developing indicators to monitor the outcomes of diverse student groups, the German-speaking Community should also formulate clear targets to be reached. This effort should involve not only the system level, but also the school and classroom level to support formative evaluation and generate sound evidence for any change in policy and practices. Moreover, collecting disaggregated data for diverse groups of students, such as students with SEN or with an immigrant background, would allow monitoring their outcomes against those of their peers and evaluate the level of inclusiveness of the system. Systems like New Zealand, which have developed comprehensive indicator frameworks to monitor students' outcomes and well-being, which can provide fruitful opportunities for peer learning (see Chapter 3).

Given the methodological challenges involved in interpreting data and using it for school improvement purposes, it will be vital to ensure that school leaders are equipped to interpret standardised assessment results correctly and to complement them with other means of monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of learning in schools. To strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its school system, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to consistently evaluate pilot projects, policies

and programmes in the area of inclusive education. These evaluations should generate rigorous evidence to assess which interventions have proven effective in improving the system's equity and inclusiveness as well as the academic and well-being outcomes of its students. Consistent evaluations of pilot projects would allow authorities to identify local policies or practices that can be scaled up and adapted to different schools or classes throughout the Community. An interesting example is that of Austria, which engages in monitoring and evaluation of policies through the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System (*Institut des Bundes für Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen*).

The limited availability of data also concerns the level funding across schools and school networks. The lack of a central reporting framework covering all schools' overall revenues and expenditures in the German-speaking Community limits the ability to relate schools' inputs to outputs, to evaluate the effectiveness of their resource use and to detect potential mismatches between schools' resources and their needs. In order to increase transparency and improve its ability to evaluate the school funding system, the German-speaking Community should develop a central reporting framework to regularly collect school-level data on revenues and expenditures across all three networks. This should include the funding received by each school from the Community, from municipalities (in the case of OSU schools) and private sources. A better empirical picture of school-level revenues could also create greater transparency, help education authorities to detect and address potential inequities and foster trust in the system.

Place students and their individual needs at the centre of learning

Placing students and their individual needs at the centre of learning will be key to developing a more inclusive education system in the German-speaking Community. The review report develops several policy recommendations to guide education authorities towards this goal. These include streamlining the process for students with SEN to obtain support, strengthening differentiated teaching and student learning, integrating mandatory training in the area of inclusive education during initial teacher education and providing regular professional learning opportunities on the subject for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff. A more student-centred approach to teaching and learning is also critical to successfully implement the Community's competency-oriented core curricula. This requires a sustained effort to foster greater cooperation and exchange among teachers, which is discussed in a separate recommendation below.

As discussed above, the German-speaking Community of Belgium uses a relatively narrow definition of inclusive education. Adopting a broader definition of inclusivity in the education system could enable the Community to further strengthen its focus on supporting all students in mainstream schools according to their individual needs. Inclusion in education is defined by UNESCO as "an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination". In an inclusive education system, all personal differences (with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, indigenous status, language, health status, etc.) are acknowledged and respected, and the core principle is that every learner matters and matters equally. Adopting such a broader definition of inclusion would help the German-speaking Community in strengthening its commitment to support each student based on their specific needs and to overcome the focus on a limited set of student groups. For instance, this would entail considering not only students with SEN, newcomer students and gifted students, but also the specific needs and challenges of girls and boys in schools, and of students who belong to the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community.

Overall, it would be helpful to link the definition of inclusion to the overall vision (*Gesamtvision*), the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) and the system's mission statement (*Leitbild*) to ensure coherence across the education system and its approach to inclusive education. Portugal, for instance, has recently introduced a clear commitment towards the development of an inclusive education system that ensures equity and inclusion for all learners in its legislation. The Decree Law No. 54/2018 states that "schools shall include

in their guidance documents the lines of action for the creation of a school culture where everyone will find opportunities to learn and the conditions for full realisation of this right, responding to the needs of each pupil, valuing diversity and promoting equity and non-discrimination in accessing the curriculum and the progression in the educational system."

To help place students at the centre of learning, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to streamline the provision of support for diverse student groups. The current process for students that need extra resources or teaching to apply for support is quite bureaucratic and rigid, which can cause delays in the time it takes for students to get the support they need. Measures to streamline this process could improve the equity and inclusivity of the system. First, schools should be able to draw on different types of support for each student including not only specialised teachers or teaching assistants, but also non-teaching staff. Moreover, flexibility in responding to students' specific needs should be supported by the provision of a pool of materials, accommodations or modifications that can address each student's needs. Secondly, since the procedure for demanding support for a student with SEN is lengthy and bureaucratic, greater flexibility in the system could reduce the waiting time for students to receive the necessary support.

Concerning students with an immigrant background and specifically newcomer students, the language support system should be made more flexible and adapted to students' needs. In particular, the language support programme should be more easily extendable beyond two years where necessary, as could be the case for late newcomer students. In doing to, the Community would need to strike a balance between the need to support students' language learning and that of quickly integrating them into mainstream education to avoid their exclusion and ensure that they participate in learning of other subjects, develop social skills and take part in the daily life of their peers in mainstream classes.

Across OECD countries, some education systems have implemented language support for students in pre-primary education, often targeting immigrant or disadvantaged students, who may need additional support to improve their language skills before accessing primary education. In the Netherlands, for example, young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to receive language-development support. These children can participate in targeted programmes at the pre-primary level (*vooren vroegschoolse educaties*) that provide support before and during the first years of school (see Chapter 3).

Another way in which the German-speaking Community should reorient its system to place students at its centre would be to offer systematically differentiated instruction based on a diagnosis of students' different learning levels and styles. Differentiated instruction is particularly important to support the learning and well-being of gifted students, and to respond adequately to the needs and learning styles of students with special education needs. For differentiation in the classroom to succeed, it will be critical for teachers to be adequately prepared to incorporate behavioural interventions and practices such as positive reinforcement, generalised behavioural intervention techniques and behavioural prompts into their teaching.

To successfully create more inclusive classroom environments, each teacher should be prepared to teach diverse students in mainstream schools and use differentiated teaching practices to respond to each student's needs. Inclusion should be integrated into teachers' competence profiles (*Kompetenzprofile)* and included as required modules in both initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional learning (CPL) activities for in-service teachers. ITE and CPL activities should cover inclusion not only with a focus on SEN but also that of students with an immigrant background, gifted students or members of the LGBTQI+ community and beyond. ITE and CPL activities should therefore also cover topics such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, differentiation and beyond. In addition, aspiring teachers should be required to complete at least one internship in a special school, in an inclusive school or in a mainstream school with an inclusion teacher, in the Community or abroad.

Reform the school calendar and seize opportunities to reduce learning gaps

The rhythm of the school calendar is an important element in the lives of students from early childhood to late adolescence. A reflection on how to optimise the school calendar concerns the well-being of children and young people but also provides opportunities to further strengthen the equity and overall performance of education systems. The German-speaking Community is currently considering the advantages and disadvantages of introducing a 7/2 school calendar that divides the school year into alternating periods of seven weeks of lessons and two weeks of holidays while shortening the summer holidays.

For the successful implementation of a school calendar reform in the German-speaking Community, it would be important to consider the needs of families carefully, including the availability of childcare and the calendar's compatibility with parents' jobs. A school calendar reform would need to be carefully prepared to investigate which impact the change would have on students, particularly on the most vulnerable, as well as their families and school personnel. It would also be crucial to invest in alternative activities to offer during the holidays that are accessible for all students, including the less advantaged, newcomers, etc. This offer could diminish the risk that students incur learning losses while ensuring that parents – and particularly mothers – do not have to compromise their working life and careers to care for their children during those weeks.

Nevertheless, there are clear benefits to shortening the summer breaks for the German-speaking Community. An alignment with the French Community, which is rearranging the school calendar in the school year 2022/23, would benefit families with children in both systems who would otherwise face significant organisational challenges dealing with two different school calendars. In addition, the non-teaching time provides an opportunity to offer additional continuing professional learning activities for teachers and support staff, who could take advantage of this time to both rest and prepare their classes as well as to receive training in particular areas. Recent school calendars reforms and holiday activities offered in other OECD countries provide instructive examples that could inform the German-speaking Community's reform (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion).

Strengthen teachers' professionalism and support their continuing professional growth throughout the teaching career

It is clear that the teaching profession will play a pivotal role in ensuring that the reforms guided by the *Gesamtvision* translate into meaningful changes in the classroom and improvements in student learning. In order to strengthen teachers' professionalism, sustainably address teacher shortages, attract talented individuals to the teaching career and sustain their motivation over time, the German-speaking Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and oriented towards continuing professional growth. To mobilise the profession in achieving this vision for the education system, it will be important to reflect on the types of competencies and attitudes that teachers will need to play their part in fulfilling it. The Community currently lacks a clear, widely shared vision for the teacher profession and the development of the *Gesamtvision* could be a good opportunity to develop one, guided by the question what and how the Community want students to learn, and what teachers need in order to enable this.

Alongside a concise vision statement for the teaching profession, the German-speaking Community should consider developing a set of well-structured and widely supported professional standards for the teaching profession that could serve an integrating role in harmonising different elements of teacher policy. As policy tools, such standards could serve as a reference point to inform the curricula for teachers' initial education, to guide school-level teacher evaluations and to support teachers' self-directed professional development. In due course, they could also provide the basis for a transparent, merit-based career ladder (see further below). The standards could be differentiated according to different levels of experience (e.g. beginning, intermediate and advanced) and include concrete examples of effective teaching practices. This would

make them more effective tools for structuring formative evaluations and give teachers a clear sense of the steps they can take to advance their careers, especially if these standards are aligned with and direct teachers to a relevant professional development offer. Developing teacher standards in close collaboration with the profession is key to their successful implementation. In addition, the process could galvanise teachers' aspirations, foster a dialogue on the future of the profession and set high expectations for quality teaching.

To ensure that beginning teachers quickly become effective educators, the German-speaking Community should consider concrete steps to further support teachers during the first years on the job. Helping new teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice, dealing with workload challenges, improving classroom practice and management, and understanding the school culture is particularly important given the high share of teachers who entered the profession through alternative pathways or completed their ITE outside the Community. It would therefore be important to complement the support groups organised by the AHS with more continuous forms of support at the school level. A number of OECD countries, including the Flemish Community, Japan and Ontario (Canada), have introduced induction initiatives providing orientation, on-the-job training and mentoring for new teachers (see Chapter 4 for a detailed description). Plans to introduce systematic mentoring support (including training for mentors) in the German-speaking Community should be pursued as an important step in this direction.

To raise the quality of teaching in the German-speaking Community further, effective forms of continuing professional learning (CPL) will be critical. As it stands, teachers' level of engagement in professional learning beyond the mandatory school-wide training days is limited. Including teacher's engagement in continuing professional learning as a dimension of the professional standards discussed above would help to create a clear expectation that CPL is a core part of their practice. To increase teachers' sense of ownership over the training offer and to ensure that it matches teachers' needs, the Community should also consider how to involve them more actively in the development of the professional learning catalogue, for example by ensuring the representation of active teachers in the professional development commission.

To link teachers' professional learning more strongly to their individual development needs and those of the system, their schools and their students, the Community should strengthen the role of formative appraisal. Teachers at all levels of experience should receive regular feedback on their work and school leaders should use it as an opportunity to discuss teachers' goals and learning needs and create individual professional learning plans to address them. This would strengthen teachers' accountability while supporting them in their learning choices. There is also scope to review more systematically how the school-wide training days are used and how activities undertaken during this time can be linked effectively to schools' improvement plans. The skills that teachers acquire through their successful engagement in professional learning should be recognised and rewarded. As discussed further below, connecting professional learning to opportunities for career advancement could be an effective means to incentivise teachers' continuing improvement and ensure that highly effective teachers assume responsibilities in the school community that are concomitant with their skills.

In addition to setting clear expectations for teachers' engagement in professional learning, teachers should be provided with the time and resources needed to pursue both individual as well as collaborative forms of professional learning. Many OECD countries set aside such time for their teachers. In Singapore, for example, every teacher is given 100 hours per year to invest in training, with guidance for their development decisions and access to teacher networks. As a result, the pursuit of continuing learning has become a regular part of teachers' day-to-day work and is engrained in schools' shared vision of the profession. Even though Singapore does not require teachers to engage in CPL, it is one of the countries with the highest levels of participation in training.

Create the conditions for greater collaboration within and between schools to improve the quality of teaching and successfully implement a competency-oriented curriculum

The successful implementation of the competency-oriented core curricula will depend on the Community's ability to foster greater cooperation and exchange among teachers. The Community's core curricula describe the general and subject-specific competencies that students are expected to develop at key stages of their primary and secondary education. Teachers in each school are expected to work in teams and take these central core curricula as a basis to develop their own school-based curricula (*schulinternes curriculum*), defining the school's approach to specific subjects (*Fachcurricula*) in line with the school's educational project, as well as the school's approach to teaching inter-disciplinary competencies across subjects (*Teilcurricula*). The development of school-internal curricula and the integration of inter-disciplinary competencies will therefore only be effective if it is understood as a collective endeavour that all teachers in a school engage in, across subject lines. This would allow teachers to collaboratively tailor teaching contents and pedagogical approaches to the needs of their students.

According to evaluations conducted between 2016 and 2020, many schools had not yet developed school-based curricula and teachers had little confidence in working with the core curricula. Promoting teachers' work with the core curricula and fostering a culture of systematic collaboration in schools will take time and needs to be supported by pedagogical leadership and resources. The experience of OECD countries shows that collaboration and the implementation of new curricula is greatly facilitated if schools operate as learning organisations in which the importance of individual, collaborative and collective learning is recognised at all levels. To make professional learning a collaborative effort, schools should not only encourage teachers to act as multipliers passing on their learning from professional development courses, but to engage in regular peer observation or enquiry projects. Assigning subject team leaders or middle managers to focus on teacher collaboration and whole-of-school projects can be an effective strategy for secondary schools with sufficiently developed leadership structures. To be effective, collaboration needs to focus on improving the quality of teaching and requires dedicated time, protocols and processes to guide teachers' conversations and actions. Central authorities should support these efforts by strengthening school leaders' competencies to support collaboration, but also by offering technical support and developing protocols that schools can draw on.

Finding the time for collaboration can be difficult in a context of acute teacher shortages, but school leaders should seek to set aside dedicated time for collaboration and collaborative learning by co-ordinating teachers' non-teaching hours. In order to facilitate this process, the German-speaking Community should consider the benefits of employing teachers under a workload system that defines their overall working time. Conceiving of teachers' working time exclusively in terms of their teaching hours fails to provide formal recognition for the time that teachers spend on important tasks outside the classroom. At the same time, it can diminish school leaders' capacity to plan their teachers' time based on a holistic conception of their work. Shanghai, Austria and Ontario (Canada) offer examples of different approaches to creating more time for teachers to collaborate (see Chapter 4).

Reform the teacher recruitment process and service codes to enable school leaders to build successful teams, facilitate teacher mobility and create synergies across networks

The German-speaking Community should seek to harmonise teachers' service codes across school networks and modernise the recruitment process in GUW and OSU schools to enable school leaders to build effective teams of teachers. The Community emphasises the autonomy of school networks and school leaders to develop their own pedagogical profiles and approaches. To turn this pedagogical autonomy into practice, it is important for school leaders to create a good match between their schools' educational project and their teachers to ensure that they can contribute to their schools' vision and continuing improvement. The Community should therefore advance plans to allow school leaders, or school providers, to consider additional information to gauge the performance and motivation of applicants

as well as their fit with the school. This could involve conducting interviews, considering motivation statements or assigning greater weight to evaluation results. To limit the strain placed on schools' administrative capacity, some OECD countries mixed systems that combine a higher degree of school autonomy with elements of a centralised recruitment system. For example, schools could be allowed to express their preferences over a given number of candidates that are selected through a centralised process or to recruit a certain share of their teaching force locally (see Chapter 4).

Another source of inefficiency in the German-speaking Community's teacher recruitment system stems from its lack of a unified teacher service code. Making the service code and the selection and eligibility criteria for teaching positions consistent across providers would increase transparency and provide the basis for further synergies in the recruitment process across the three networks. A unified service code could, for example, facilitate the introduction of a common pool of substitute teachers serving schools of all three networks. To improve teachers' mobility in the first years of their careers, the Community should also consider recognising teachers' prior service across school networks, rather than requiring the 720 days of service needed for a permanent position to be accrued in schools of a single provider.

Expand elements of distributed leadership to strengthen school leaders' capacity for pedagogical leadership and create opportunities for professional growth

In order to successfully implement student-centred curricula and develop schools into learning organisations, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen its schools' capacity for pedagogical leadership. Creating more opportunities for teachers – not only in secondary education – to assume responsibilities associated with formal career steps would facilitate distributed leadership by enabling principals to delegate certain aspects of their work to experienced teachers and focus on their core responsibilities. Creating deputy or middle manager roles in primary schools above a certain size and adding additional career steps in secondary schools would strengthen school leaders' ability to capitalise on teachers' skills, exercise autonomy in their differentiation of roles within the school while at the same time creating a pipeline for future school leaders. Better prospects for career progression could also improve teachers' long-term motivation and raise the profession's attractiveness for top-performing students considering initial teacher education.

Countries like Estonia and Singapore provide examples of how multi-stage career structures can be used to support teachers' professional growth (see Chapter 4). A reformed career structure in the German-speaking Community could build on existing roles, such as those of middle managers and subject team leaders, and should be associated with a corresponding salary progression. Different career stages should be linked to competency levels (e.g. corresponding to a differentiated set of teacher standards and including a dimension for leadership competency) and teachers' advancement should be based on merit, rather than their seniority. Career advancement could be based on a voluntary system of registration statuses that teachers need to obtain to apply for a promotion and periodically renew. The decision on teachers' career progression or certification for professional advancement should have an external component and a greater degree of formality than teachers' regular formative appraisal, in order to ensure fairness across schools. While the process can be mostly school-based and led by the school leader (or another member of the management group), the inspectorate or an accredited external evaluator with expertise in the same area as the appraised teacher should be involved.

Strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation and student-centred school improvement

A more distributed and strengthened leadership could also strengthen schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation and collective school improvement efforts. Since 2009, the German-speaking Community has made significant progress in fostering school improvement by introducing regular internal and external school evaluations. Nevertheless, schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation and continuous work on

their development remains uneven. To address this challenge, the Community should not only seek to strengthen schools' internal capacity, but also that of the external support services that assist schools in following-up on evaluation results. To this end, the government should pursue plans to create an institute for school development (*Institut für Schulentwicklung in Ostbelgien*, ISEO). The institute could more closely integrate the work of the school development counselling service and the pedagogical advisory services, which would create synergies, facilitate their collaboration and make it easier for schools to access the help they need. In the process, education authorities should seek to identify where additional expertise is required (e.g. in the areas of pre-primary education or special education needs) and seek to strengthen the support services' capacity accordingly.

International evidence suggests that school evaluation and improvement systems based on "internal accountability" are more effective than compliance-oriented ones since they encourage teachers and schools to take ownership of their school improvement and exercise agency to make such improvement happen, including through professional learning. External evaluations should therefore place particular emphasis on schools' processes for self-evaluations, formative staff-appraisal and development planning and evaluate whether they use them effectively, rather than focusing on compliance alone. Where needed, targeted, intensive follow-up support (from the school development counselling services, pedagogical advisory services or others) should be readily available for schools to help them implement their development evaluation plans and address the needs identified in the evaluation process.

In the longer-term, the German-speaking Community could consider moving towards a risk-based approach to school evaluation by reducing the frequency and intensity of evaluations for high-performing schools. An example for this approach can be seen in the Netherlands, where the inspectorate acknowledges the progress made by schools with strong self-evaluation systems while focusing the evaluation's resources and follow-up support on schools that are most in need of rapid improvement (see Chapter 4). To strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation, the German-speaking Community should refine its leadership training and accessible resources to help leaders develop and use multi-year school development plans to advance their "school project", to place the quality of teaching at the centre, and to collect and use relevant data to support the process. A greater emphasis on collaboration, distributed leadership and continuing professional learning in schools (see above) would complement and support this process, as would strengthening inter-school collaboration, e.g. by pairing experienced school leaders with less experienced peers.

1 The education system of the German-speaking Community of Belgium in comparison

This chapter provides an overview of the main contextual features of the German-speaking Community's education system, including recent reforms, developments influencing educational planning and the use of resources in the education sector. It also presents the main characteristics of the German-speaking Community's education system itself (from pre-primary to upper secondary education), including its structure and governance, its main educational goals and mechanisms for quality assurance. The chapter further presents the available evidence on the system's performance and equity in international comparison, and highlights ongoing policy developments that provide the context for the Community's development of its overall vision for the education system.

Governance, population and economy of the German-speaking Community

Governance

The German-speaking Community is divided into two cantons situated in the Eastern part of Belgium, bordering the French Community. The German-speaking Community extends from the Dutch border in the North to the border of Luxembourg in the South. In the East, the Community shares a border with the German states of North-Rhine Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate (see Figure 1.1). The German-speaking Community's capital city is Eupen. There are three tiers of government in Belgium: the Federal State, the Regions and the Communities. The Federal Government has responsibility for areas including social security, justice and defence. The responsibilities of the three Regions (the Flemish, Walloon and the Brussels Capital Regions) revolve mainly around matters related to the territory and the economy, including competencies related to transport, the funding of local municipalities, regional planning, energy, environmental protection and social policy. The three Communities (the German-speaking, French and Flemish Communities) are responsible for matters related to social affairs, culture, media, tourism youth, language and education. The German-speaking Community is part of the Walloon Region.

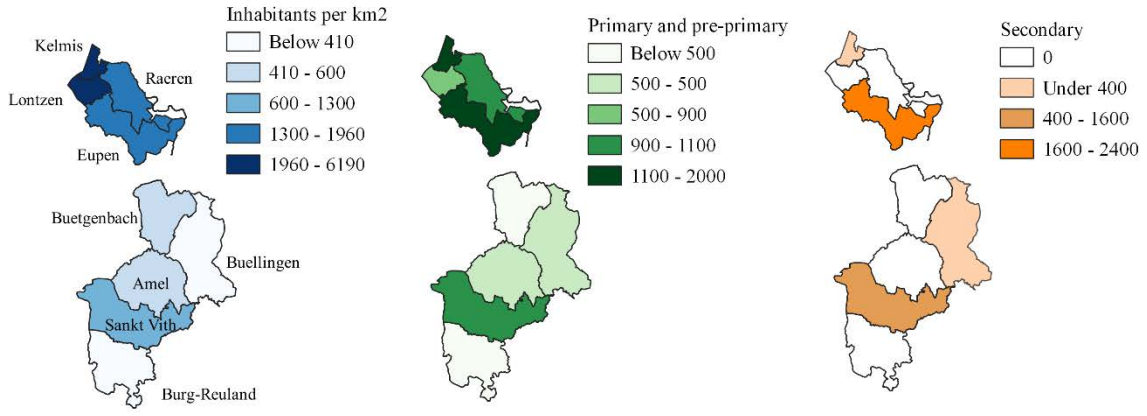
The Minister of Education and Scientific Research is one of four ministers forming the German-speaking Community's executive government for the legislative period 2019-24.[1] The Community's public administration is the Ministry of the German-speaking Community (*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, MDG). As of as of 30 June 2021, the Ministry counted about 350 full-time equivalent staff members, organised in 19 departments covering areas ranging from infrastructure, finance and tourism to pedagogy, teaching staff and the organisation of learning.[2] Since 1989, each of the three Communities has been responsible for its own education system. Only a small number of responsibilities for education remain at the level of the Federal Government, namely determining the beginning and end of compulsory education, the conditions for the award of recognised qualifications, and the retirement regulations for education staff.

Population and student numbers

The German-speaking Community is the smallest of the three Belgian Communities and, in January 2021, was home to a population of around 78 - 100 (0.7% of the overall population of Belgium). Birth rates have been steady since 2012, following a decrease between 1992 and 2008 and an increase until 2012. In the aggregate, the German-speaking Community has experienced a population growth of 3.9% since 2010 (slightly below that of the French and Flemish Communities).[3] The German-speaking Community comprises nine municipalities, divided into the Northern Canton of Eupen (which contains the eponymous municipality and seat of the government, Eupen, as well as Kelmis, Lontzen and Raeren) and the Southern Canton of St. Vith (which contains Amel, Büllingen, Burg-Reuland, Bütgenbach and the municipality St. Vith). The northern municipalities are more urbanised and densely populated, while the southern municipalities are more rural and sparsely populated (see Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Map of the German-speaking Community of Belgium

Population density and student numbers across municipalities (NUTS 3)



Sources: OECD model map for administrative boundaries; FÖD Wirtschaft, Generaldirektion Statistik und Wirtschaftsinformation Darstellung und Auswertung : W S R, http://www.ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2569/4686_read-32765/, for population data, *Ostbelgien Statistik*, www.ostbelgienstatistik.be (accessed on 15 December 2021).

As is described in more detail in Chapter 3, the German-speaking Community has a significant immigrant population and a large French-speaking linguistic minority. In 2020, around 78.7% of the German-speaking Community's residents held Belgian citizenship. Another 17.7% were citizens of other EU countries, the majority of them German and living in the canton of Eupen. The remaining 3.5% held non-EU citizenship. The proportion of foreign residents is considerably higher in the northern municipalities (29.7%) than in the South (8.0%).[4] In addition, around 22% of the Belgian citizens living in the Community had foreign roots (i.e. at least one parent who had a foreign nationality when they first registered or had a foreign nationality themselves when they first registered) - 8% with roots outside the EU (Das Statistikportal - Ostbelgien, 2020[1]).

Table 1.1. Distribution of inhabitants and students across municipalities, 2020

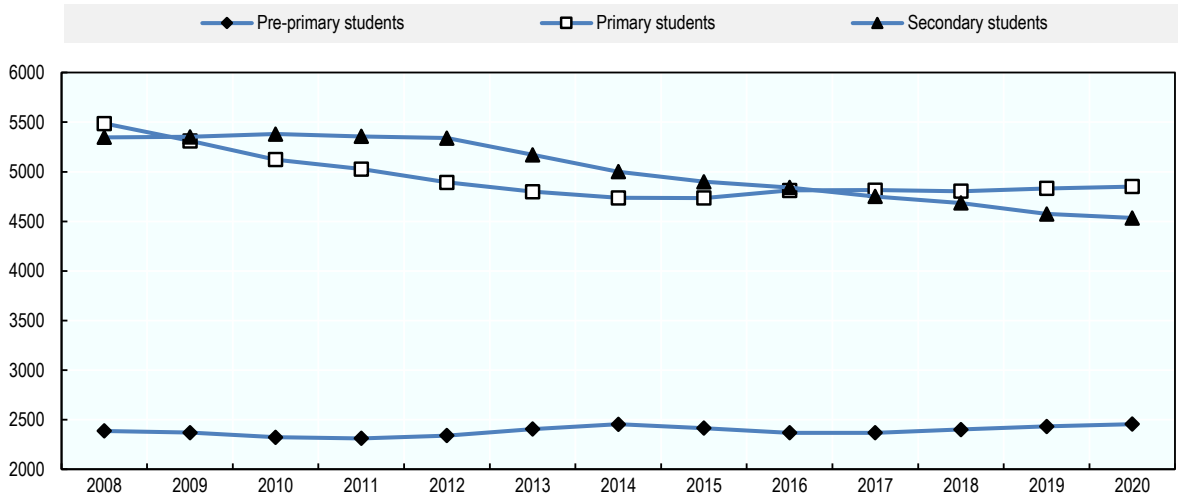
Municipality	Inhabitants	Inhabitants per km2	Pre-primary students	Primary students	Secondary students
Amel	5 486	43.8	153	353	0
Büllingen	5 456	36.3	168	293	238
Bütgenbach	5 629	57.8	168	281	0
Eupen	19 762	190.5	625	1 335	2 379
Kelmis	11 212	618.8	360	727	342
Lontzen	5 833	203.0	187	363	0
Raeren	10 818	145.8	359	582	0
St. Vith	9 779	66.6	326	705	1 575
Burg-Reuland	3 974	36.5	109	212	0

Note: The numbers of students refers to those enrolled in a given municipality, not their place of residence.
Source: Ostbelgien Statistik (2021[2]), *Bevölkerung*, https://ostbelgien.inzahlen.be (accessed on 15 December 2021).

While student numbers in other parts of Belgium have risen significantly over the past decades, those in the German-speaking Community have steadily declined. Between the school years 2008/09 and 2020/21, the number of students in mainstream education dropped by 12% in primary education (from 5 487 to

4 851) and by 15% in secondary education (from 5 347 to 4 534). Only in pre-primary education did enrolment increase by 12% from 2 386 to 2 455 (see Figure 1.2). Based on forecasts conducted by the Federal Planning Bureau and Statistics Belgium, the total number of students is expected to start rising again in the coming years – until 2026 in pre-primary education, until 2029 in primary education, and until 2035 in secondary education. Overall student numbers in pre-primary to secondary education and special needs education are forecast to grow by 10% from 2020/21 to 2026/27 (from around 12 200 to 13 400), followed by a period of further, more moderate growth and a slow decline starting in around 2033/34.[5]

Figure 1.2. Trends in student enrolment in the German-speaking Community, 2008-2020



Note: Mainstream education only.
Source: Ostbelgien Statistik (2021[2]) *Schüler und Studierende*, https://ostbelgien.inzahlen.be/dashboard/ostbelgien-in-zahlen/schule-und-bildung/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/3dfn5q

Economy and labour market

According to the National Accounts Institute (*Institut des Comptes Nationaux*, ICN) the German-speaking Community's gross value added (GVA) stood at EUR 1 933 million in 2019, corresponding to 0.45% of the Belgian economy (MDG, 2022[3]). The German-speaking Community's gross domestic product (GDP) at market prices per capita is below the national and European average. In 2019, it stood at 89% of the EU27 average and at 67% of the national level (66% of the Flemish Region, 39% of the Brussels capital region, and 92% of the Walloon Region [which includes the German-speaking Community]).[6] Since many of the German-speaking Community's residents are commuting to work in the French Community, Germany or Luxembourg, the GDP per capita somewhat underestimates the region's wealth. The GDP per employee working in the German-speaking Community was slightly higher than the GDP per inhabitant, but still stood at only 79% of the national average in 2018.[7]

In 2017, labour productivity (i.e. GDP per employee) in the German-speaking Community was significantly below the other Belgian Communities, at just 79% of the national average, which may be partly explained by the composition of the local economy. In 2017, the primary sector contributed about 2% of GPD (twice as much as the national average), whereas the tertiary service sector contributed around 68% of GPD (compared to 78% at the national level).[8] The German-speaking Community has a significant secondary sector, accounting for 30% of GDP (compared to 22% across Belgium in 2017) and around 21.5% of

employees worked in manufacturing, including firms specialising in electrical equipment, rubber and plastics, metal-processing and food production (Eurydice, 2020[4]). The German-speaking Community also has a high share of small businesses with 82.25% of businesses counting fewer than ten employees (Ostbelgien Statistik, 2017[5]). As of July 2021, based on national statistics, the unemployment rate in the German-speaking Community stood at 6.7%. This was below the national level of 9.2% and those of the Walloon Region (13.2%) and Brussels capital region (16.7%), but slightly above that of the Flemish Region (5.9%) (Arbeitsamt der DG, 2021[6]). Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in Belgium overall were slightly below the EU average (Eurostat, 2021[7]).

Main features of the German-speaking Community's education system

In the 2020/21 school year, the German-speaking Community's education system comprised ten secondary schools (one of them the centre for special needs pedagogy [*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP]) and 57 primary school sites, serving around 9 400 students in total. In 2018, the German-speaking Community's primary and secondary schools enrolled around 0.47% of the Belgian student population.[9] While each of the nine municipalities is served by at least one primary school, the secondary schools are concentrated in four municipalities: Büllingen, Eupen, Kelmis and St. Vith.

Given the German-speaking Community's shared borders and economic ties with the French Community of Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg, there is some cross-border movement of students. A sizeable number of students living in the municipalities of Raeren and Kelmis, for example, attend schools in Germany and schools in Kelmis serve around 80 students from Plombières in the neighbouring French Community of Belgium. In turn, a significant number of students living in the German-speaking Community attend schools in the French Community (MDG, 2022[8]).

The principal language of instruction is German, but the Community emphasises multilingualism as an important goal of its education system. French plays a particularly prominent role due to the Community's francophone minority and the importance of French-language skills for students' success in the regional labour market, given its close ties with the French Community of Belgium. According to an analysis of job vacancies carried out by the Economic and Social Council, 40% of job openings in the German-speaking Community required French-language skills in 2020 (MDG, 2022[3]). French is taught as a first foreign language starting in pre-primary school. Since 2011/12, primary schools can also offer bilingual instruction as part of pilot projects and one primary school of the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU) in Eupen operates classes exclusively in French, teaching German as first foreign language. Although there are no secondary schools with French as a medium of instruction, secondary schools can offer up to 65% of classes in French during the first stage and 50% during the second and third stages, in order to facilitate the integration of students that attended French primary schools and to promote multilingualism (MDG, 2022[8]).

Structure of the education system

Compulsory full-time education in the German-speaking Community starts in the calendar year in which children turn five, since it was brought forward by one year in 2020, and usually begins with one year of pre-primary education (*Kindergarten*). The Community is thus one of about a third of OECD and partner countries where compulsory education starts before the age of six (OECD, 2021, pp. 446, Table X1.5[9]). Compulsory full-time education ends in the calendar year in which students turn 15 and typically comprises the first two years of secondary education. However, unlike in the majority of OECD countries, where compulsory education ends at age 16, it remains compulsory for students in the German-speaking Community to engage in some form of education, including part-time vocational education (see below) or an apprenticeship until the age of 18 (or the completion of secondary education). Schooling is free of

charge for the entirety of compulsory education. Figure 1.4 provides a schematic overview of the structure of the German-speaking Community's education system, which is explained in more detail below.

Stages and pathways in the school system

The German-speaking Community's education system is organised in four main stages, preceded by pre-primary education, which is non-compulsory until age 5. The school system is stratified and a first streaming of students occurs at the beginning of secondary education (typically at age 12), when around 10% of students who have not successfully completed primary education enter a separate "B-stream". For students who successuflly completed primary education, the first tracking occurs at the second stage of secondary education, typically at age 14, compared to the majority of EU and OECD countries, which start tracking at age 15 or 16 (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2020[10]).

- **Pre-primary education** (typical ages: 3-6) is available free of charge to children from the age of three and, starting in 2024/25, will be opened to children from the age of two and a half. The attendance of pre-primary education is mandatory from age five. In 2020, there were 55 pre-primary school sites in the German-speaking Community, all but one of which were attached to a primary school.
- **Primary education** (typical ages: 6-12) lasts for six years. Students who achieve the objectives of the curriculum at the end of primary education receive a certificate of completion.
- **The first stage of secondary education** (typical ages: 12-14) lasts for two years and is organised in two streams: the "A-stream" and the "B-stream". The A-stream, or "observation stream" (*Beobachtungsstufe*), is intended to provide students with a shared curriculum of basic general education and orient them in their further education pathway. The A-stream is attended by the majority of students. In the school year 2020/21, 92% of students were enrolled in the A-stream in the first year and 89% in the second year (see Figure 1.3). Students who did not receive a certificate for the successful completion of primary education enrol in the differentiated B-stream, or "assimilation stream" (*Anpassungsstufe*). The B-stream aims to provide students with targeted support to make up for their deficits and prepare them for completing their primary school certificate before entering a technical or vocationally-oriented pathway. Students can switch from the B-stream to the A-stream on recommendation of the class council[10] (and, in case students have not successfully completed their primary school certificate, a positive evaluation from the admissions council [*Zulassungsrat*] and Kaleido Ostbelgien)[11] (MDG, 2022[8]).
- **The second and third stages of secondary education** (typical ages: 14-18) are divided into three tracks: general, technical and vocational. Students who completed the A-stream have the choice between all three tracks. Students who completed the B-stream can enter the vocational track and the "qualifying classes" in the technical track (see below). To enter the 9th grade of the general track, students who completed the B-stream need to first complete a year of vocational education (9th grade). Lower secondary education comprises the first stage of secondary education as well as the first year of the second stage of secondary education in the general and technical tracks and both years of the second stage of secondary education in the vocational track. After its successful completion, students receive a certificate of lower secondary education.

  The third and final stage of secondary education lasts three years. Like the second stage, it is divided into a general, a technical and a vocational pathway, all three of which allow students to obtain a certificate of upper secondary education on successful completion, which permits them to enter higher education. When transitioning from the second to the third stage of secondary education, students have the option to switch between tracks, although switching from the vocational track to the technical or general tracks is not common and requires a positive evaluation from the admissions council. After successfully completing 12th grade of the vocational track,

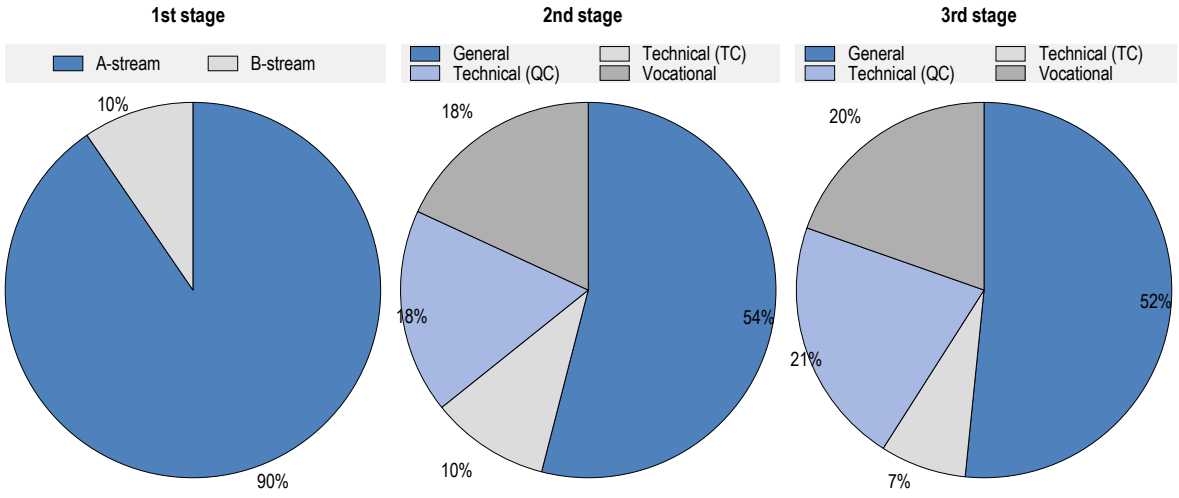
students have another option to enter 11th grade in the technical track ("qualifying classes") (Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 2021[11]).

- **General secondary education** (*allgemeinbildender Sekundarunterricht*) offers a broad general education programme that prepares students for progression to tertiary education. The choice between different optional subjects allow students to specialise as they progress in the general pathway while maintaining the opportunity to enter a wide range of tertiary programmes. Successful completion of the 12th year of general secondary education allows students to enrol in higher education. In 2020/21, 54% of students in the second stage and 52% of students in the third stage of secondary education were enrolled in the general track (864 of 1 600 and 723 of 1 401 students respectively).
- **Technical secondary education** (*technischer Sekundarunterricht*) offers a combination of general, technical, theoretical and practical subjects. Students following the technical pathway can choose between transitional classes (*Übergangsunterricht*) and qualifying classes (*Befähigungsunterricht*). The transitional classes are offered in ten areas of specialisation (incl. applied business and economics, education, social science, sports or electro mechanics) and are designed to prepare students for a technical profession or further tertiary education. The qualifying classes are offered in 26 areas of specialisation (incl. public relations, applied art and graphic design, mechanics or carpentry) and are designed for students who seek to practice a profession after the end of secondary school. Successful completion of the 12th year of technical secondary education allows students to enrol in higher education. In 2020/21, 28% of students in the second stage and 28% of students in the third stage of secondary education were enrolled in the technical tracks (446 of 1 600 and 313 of 1 401 students respectively).
- **Vocational secondary education** (*berufsbildender Sekundarunterricht*) focuses on practice-oriented education preparing students for entry to the labour market. Four secondary schools[12] offer the vocational track, covering over 30 different areas (e.g. in sales, office management, gastronomy, hospitality or agriculture). In order to obtain a leaving certificate qualifying for entry into tertiary education, students of the vocational track need to complete an additional, 13th year of studies. In 2020/21 18% of students in the second stage and 20% of students in the third stage of secondary education were enrolled in the vocational tracks (290 of 1 600 and 275 of 1 401 students respectively).

From the age of 15, students are no longer obliged to engage in full-time education. They can opt to pursue an apprenticeship (mittelständische Ausbildung) after completing the first two years of general secondary education (8th grade), or the first three years of vocational secondary education (9th grade). Students who have not successfully completed these years need to pass an entrance exam in order to start an apprenticeship (Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 2021[11]).

Students who do not engage in an apprenticeship can also enter a **part-time vocational education** (*Teilzeitunterricht*, TZU) programme from the age of 15 (or from the age of 16 for those who have not yet completed the first two years of secondary education). Introduced in 1983, TZU combines two days a week of school-based education with three days of work-based learning. At the end of the first year of part-time vocational education, students can obtain a certificate of completion of primary education (in case they had not yet obtained it), or – depending on their success – a certificate that permits them to start an apprenticeship or transition to vocational secondary education. As of September 2020, 26 students were engaged in part-time vocational education, offered by two technical secondary schools.

Figure 1.3. Distribution of students across pathways in mainstream secondary education, 2020



Note: TC = transitional classes; QC = qualifying classes.
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

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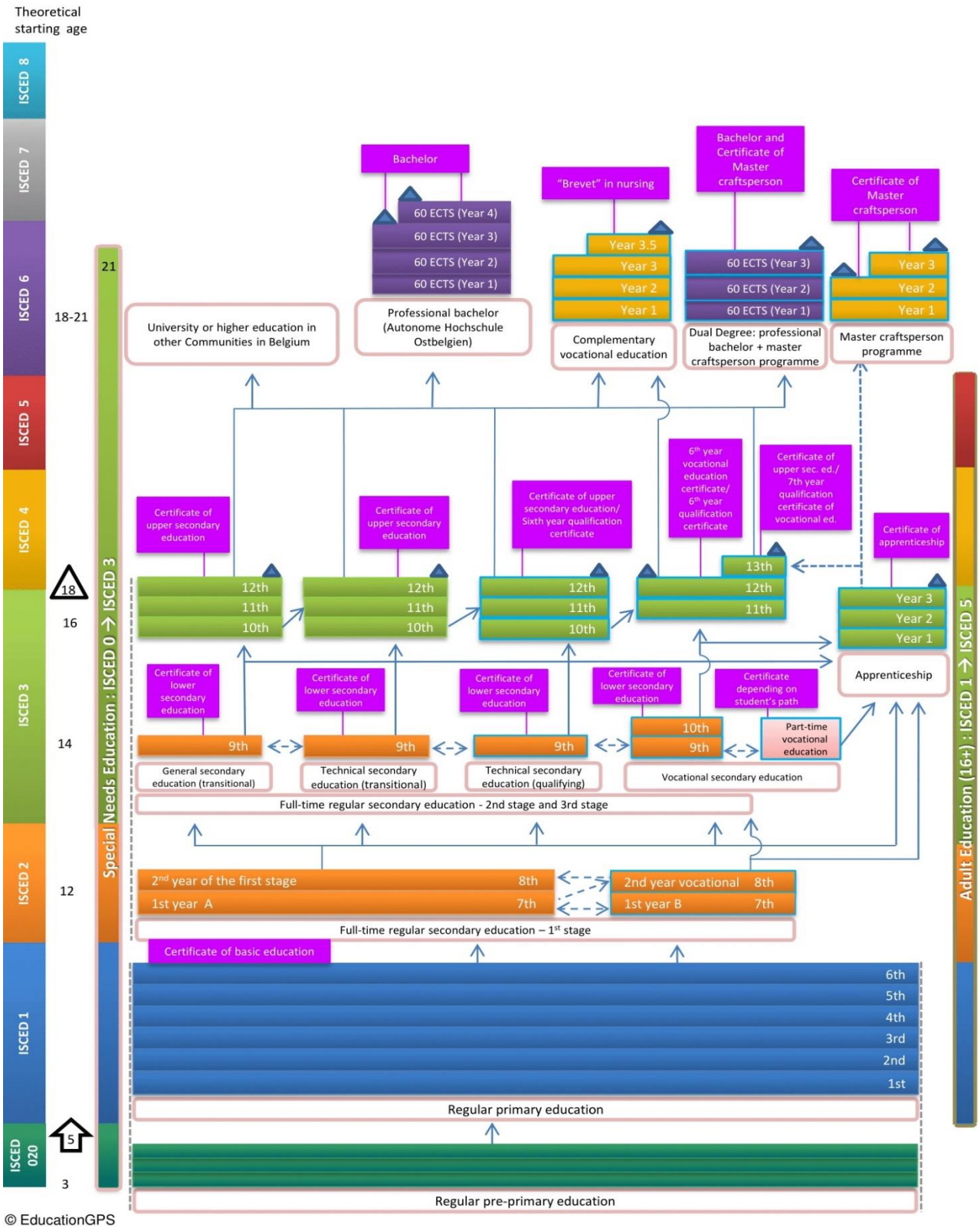
Offer for students with special education needs (SEN)

Students with special education needs (SEN) can enrol in one of four SEN primary schools and one SEN secondary school or attend classes in mainstream schools as special needs *projects* (*Förderprojekte*). There is one integrated primary school in Bütgenbach that places special emphasis on the individual support of SEN in mixed learning groups. Special needs education in the German-speaking Community of Belgium remains largely governed by a 1970 legal framework, although a 2009 reform (*Förderdekret*) sought to modernise the Community's SEN system by providing additional financial support and advice for students with SEN (MDG, 2022[8]). Furthermore, different levels of support are available to support students with SEN in mainstream schools, which is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Higher education

The *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (AHS) is the only higher education institution in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. The AHS was created in 2005 following the merger of three higher education institutions, including two teacher education institutions run by the Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW) and the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU), respectively. Today, the AHS is governed by an autonomous board of directors and, legally, part of the OSU network. The AHS offers professional bachelor programmes in health care and nursing, pre-primary and primary education. The AHS also co-operates with the Institute for Vocational and Educational Training in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, IAWM) to offer joint vocational and bachelor studies (*duales Studium*) in accounting, banking, insurance and, since 2019, public and business administration. In the academic year 2020/21, 238 students were enrolled in the AHS (MDG, 2022[8]).

Figure 1.4. Structure of the German-speaking Community's education system, 2021



Note: For a detailed legend, see https://gpseducation.oecd.org/.
Source: OECD (2021), *Education GPS*, https://gpseducation.oecd.org/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Structure of the school year and school day

The school calendar of the German-speaking Community is determined by the Community's government, which decides on the first and last days of the school year and the timing of holidays and Community-wide days of no instruction. On average, the school year includes 181 days of instruction (MDG, 2022[8]) – close to the OECD average of 184 days in primary education and 183-186 days in secondary education (OECD, 2021, pp. 393, Table D4.1[9]). In addition, each school in the Community can decide on three or four instruction days a year to dedicate to the collective professional learning of all staff.

As per the 1999 Decree on Mainstream Primary Education, primary school students engage in 28 weekly hours of instruction, taking place on weekdays between 8am and 4pm with a lunch break of at least 60 minutes. Wednesday afternoons are free of instruction (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1999[12]). The exact times of the start and end of instruction are decided by the school leadership. At the secondary level, students engage in at least 28 and in up to 36 hours of instruction per week, taking place on weekdays between 8am and 5pm, including a lunch break of at least 50 minutes (MDG, 2022[8]).

In Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community reported to spend on average 30.3 hours learning in regular lessons per week. This was significantly above the OECD average of 27.5 hours and one of the longest times reported in any OECD country, with the exception of the United States and Chile (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.6.1[13]). Correspondingly, a large share of students (23%) reported to spend 32 hours or more in regular lessons per week, compared to just 18% of students across the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.6.13[13]). This is partly explained by the German-speaking Community's strong emphasis on foreign language learning, which 15-year-olds reported to engage in for 6.4 hours of regular lessons per week. This was the largest amount in any OECD education system and above the OECD average of just 3.6 hours.

In 2021, the French Community of Belgium has announced plans to revise its school calendar starting in 2022-23 with a view to shorten the summer holidays by two weeks and instead lengthen the All Saints holidays in November (*congé d'automne*) and the Carnival holidays (*congé de détente*) in February. The German-speaking Community is weighing the benefits and risks of engaging in a similar reform and has conducted a stakeholder survey in 2019 in which a majority of respondents expressed a preference for maintaining the status quo (MDG, 2022[8]).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Since its onset in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions to school systems across the world, including the German-speaking Community of Belgium. The OECD has documented its impacts using a Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID 19 School Closures, carried out in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, which was complemented in by additional surveys administered by the OECD for its member and partner countries. On average across the 30 OECD members and partner countries with comparable data for all levels of education, pre-primary schools were closed for 55 days, primary schools for 78 days, lower secondary schools for 92 days and upper secondary schools for 101 days between 1 January 2020 and 20 May 2021 (OECD, 2021[14]).

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, in-person teaching was suspended in pre-primary, primary and secondary education from 16 March to 15 May 2020. During this time, schools transitioned to distance learning and decided by which means (digital or analogue) they would ensure the continuity of students' learning. A gradual return to in-person teaching was implemented by level of education over the course of May and June 2020. Starting with the 2020/21 school year, a traffic light system was introduced to regulate the hygiene and social distancing measures as well as the mode of instruction (in-person, hybrid or remote) and scope of in-person activities based on the current severity of the pandemic. (In the context

of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD review visit took place virtually via video-conference). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry has also provided students in need with laptops and reaffirmed its commitment to expand internet connectivity, to hire additional personnel to manage information and communications technology (ICT) resources and to provide teachers and secondary school students with laptops (see Chapter 2).

Governance of the school system

The school networks and the role of school providers

Schools in the German-speaking Community are organised in three school networks (*Schulnetze*):

- **The Community Education System** (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW) includes public schools funded and run directly by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research of the German-speaking Community. The network comprises three schools with integrated pre-primary, primary and secondary levels (in urban areas), one stand-alone secondary school, one centre for part-time vocational education, as well as the ZFP centre for special needs pedagogy, which works in three primary schools, one secondary school and one boarding school (see Chapter 3).
- **The Official Subsidised Education System** (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU) is the public municipal school network run by the nine municipalities. As of 2020, the OSU network was responsible for 52 of the 57 primary school sites and most pre-primary schools in the German-speaking Community.
- **The Free Subsidised Education System** (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU) includes publicly subsidised private schools, which can be managed by organisations or private individuals. Currently, all recognised FSU schools are run by a single provider, the Association of Episcopal Schools (*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, BSDG). The network comprises two primary schools with integrated pre-primary schools (one of which has an integrated SEN primary school), five secondary schools, two of which have an integrated boarding school, and a centre for part-time vocational education. There are no independent private schools in the German-speaking Community that do not receive public funding.

Table 1.2 illustrates how students in the German-speaking Community are distributed across levels of education and the three school networks.

Table 1.2. Distribution of students across levels of education and school networks, Sept 2020

Type of school / School network	GUW	OSU	FSU	Total
Pre-primary school	340	1 965	150	**2 455**
Primary school	861	3 609	381	**4 851**
Secondary school	2 329	-	2 205	**4 534**
Part-time VET	14	-	12	**26**
Special needs education	271	-	48	**319**
Total	**3 815**	**5 574**	**2 796**	**12 185**

Note: GUW = Community Education System; OSU = Official Subsidised Education System; FSU = Free Subsidised Education System; The 528 apprentices associated with the Centre for Training and Continuing Education (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, ZAWM) and the 253 master craftsmen students (Sept 2020) are not included in the table.
Source: German-speaking Community of Belgium (2022[8]), *OECD Education Policy Reviews: Background Report of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.*

Due to the principle of free school choice and public funding of private providers, the German-speaking Community has a large private sector, particularly at the secondary level. In September 2020, 49% of

secondary students in the German-speaking Community attended private schools (see Table 1.2), slightly below the private enrolment in secondary schools across Belgium (58%), but significantly above the OECD average of about 19%. The private sector is smaller at the primary level, where 8% of students in the German-speaking Community attended a private school in 2020, compared to 54% across Belgium and around 12% on average across the OECD in 2019 (MDG, 2022[8]).[13]

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for formulating the Community's education policy and oversees its implementation in all schools. It provides most of the public subsidies for education and validates schools' curricula. In addition, the Minister of Education and Scientific Research assumes responsibilities as a school provider (*Schulträger*) of the Community schools. The school providers (the minister in the case of GUW schools, the municipalities in the case OSU schools and the BSDG in the case of FSU schools) are responsible for approving their schools' curricula, for the pedagogical methods applied in their schools, for the recruitment of staff and the organisation of learning.

The schools of the OSU network are supervised by school aldermen (*Schulschöffen*) who are political representatives in their respective municipalities and intervene on behalf of their schools, primarily in budgetary, structural and political matters. A network co-ordinator facilitates the communication and co-ordination between the nine municipalities' aldermen and school leaders in monthly meetings. In the FSU-network, the co-ordinator of the Catholic Education Secretariat (*Sekretariat des Katholischen Unterrichtswesens*) plays a similar role, facilitating the co-ordination between the leaders of their schools. All schools of the GUW network are supervised directly by the minister. At the time of the OECD review visit, there was no separate co-ordination structure in the GUW network but a co-ordinator position was introduced in September 2021.

The highest decision-making body in schools is the school council (*Pädagogischer Rat*), which is appointed by the school provider and consists of the school leader, the deputy and at least five other members of staff (pedagogical, medical or socio-psychological staff). Members of the school council are elected for a term of three years by secret ballot and meet at least four times annually to be informed and consult on all questions related to the organisation of the school and its pedagogy. Members of the school middle management that are not elected to the school council serve as consulting members. The school leader usually adopts the decisions taken by the school council.

School autonomy and school choice

Education in the three Belgian Communities is subject to the principle of "freedom of education" guaranteed by Article 24 of the Constitution. Parents are free to select a school of their choice and are guaranteed a place for their child as long as they meet the general admissions criteria for a given level of education and school type. Admissions criteria are regulated by the 1998 Basic Decree on Education (*Grundlagendekret*, henceforth, "the 1998 Decree"),[14] which generally require subsidised schools to admit all Belgian citizens and registered residents living in the German-speaking Community (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1998[15]). OSU schools are required to admit students residing within their municipality or those from neighbouring municipalities if they are the closest school. Admission to FSU schools requires the students or parents' agreement with the school's pedagogical project and any denial of admission needs to be justified in writing (MDG, 2022[8]).

The principle of freedom of education extends to the right of any natural or legal person to set up a school, recruit staff and determine the (educational, religious or ideological) principles of the school. Schools also enjoy considerable autonomy in developing curricula, organising teaching and student assessment within the boundaries set by the regulatory framework (Nusche et al., 2015[16]). Parents can also choose to engage in home schooling, which is subject to the oversight of the school inspectorate and requires students to pass exams administered by the external school examination board in order to obtain certificates at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school. In 2020/21, 69 students registered for home schooling in the Community, almost twice as much as in the preceding school year,

which may be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic context (MDG, Community, Ministry of the German-speaking, 2021[17]).

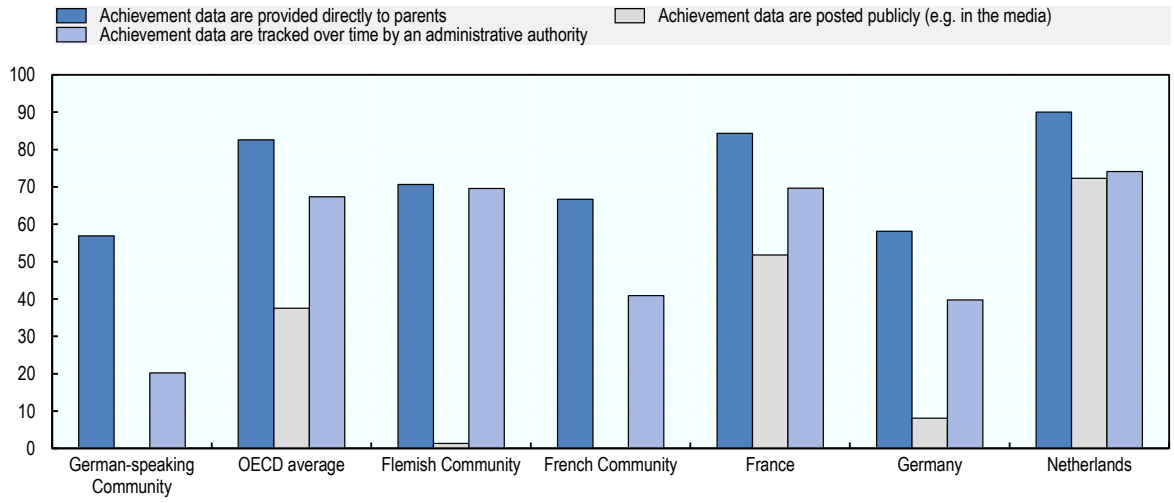
Since the German-speaking Community funds public and private schools for each student they enrol, this creates incentives for schools to attract students and promotes parental choice. Given its small size and relative density, the great majority of parents in the German-speaking Community can choose among several schools within a reasonable distance from their homes. According to principals surveyed for PISA 2018, 72% of students in the German-speaking Community attended schools that competed for students with at least two other schools in the area (compared to 63% on average across the OECD). Only 1.1% of students were in schools that reported no direct competition from another, significantly below the OECD average of 22.1%, as well as those in the Flemish Community (5.3%) and the French Community (8.5%) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.7.7[13]).

In other OECD countries with a high level of school autonomy, schools often face increased accountability for their performance (OECD, 2017[18]) and systems with extensive parental choice often undertake efforts to ensure that parents can make their choices based on information about school quality and performance. However, the German-speaking Community makes little use of assessment data to inform parents' choices and the accessibility of data on school performance is rather limited, which is similar to the approach taken by the Flemish Community of Belgium (Nusche et al., 2015[16]).

As shown in Figure 1.5, many students across the OECD attend schools whose principal reports to publicly share achievement data (38%), to share achievement data with parents (83%) or to have their achievement tracked by an administrative authority (67%). All of these practices were significantly less common in the German-speaking Community, even when compared to the lower-intensity accountability systems in the Flemish and French Communities. Only 57% of schools in the German-speaking Community provided parents with achievement data, compared to 90% in the Netherlands, and 84% in France. While a similarly low proportion of schools in Germany provided achievement data directly to parents, 8% shared this data publicly and 40% reported to have their performance tracked by public authorities, compared to 0% and 20% in the German-speaking Community respectively (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.8.7[13]).

Figure 1.5. Using achievement data for accountability purposes, 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report the following practices



Source: OECD (2020[13]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.8.7 and V.B1.8.7.

StatLink https://stat.link/59w4zs

System-wide and student learning goals

System-wide core curricula and student learning goals

The German-speaking Community sets core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) describing the competencies that students are expected to develop (*Kompetenzerwartungen*) in specific subjects at key stages of their primary and secondary education (MDG, 2022[8]). At the primary level and the first stage of secondary education, core curricula have been developed for German as a language of instruction or first foreign language, physical education, music, art, ethics, mathematics, science and technology, history, geography and French as a first foreign language or language of instruction and for professional orientation. Most of the current core curricula have been in place since 2008 and are currently being revised.[15]

Each of the original core curricula was developed by working groups comprised of subject teachers (two appointed by each school network) under the leadership of a Ministry official and drawing on the advice and support of an external expert. The ministerial leaders of the working groups evaluated the drafts' quality and coherence and – after the working group's revisions – submitted the draft curricula for comments from an "impulse group" consisting of the school networks' co-ordinators as well as representatives of the AHS, the minister's cabinet and the external evaluation. The network co-ordinators were responsible for eliciting feedback from school leaders, who in turn were asked to consult their teachers. Based on this feedback, the working group revised the draft core curricula and finalised them in co-ordination with the impulse group before their submission to the Parliament (MDG, 2022[8]). For the revision of existing curricula, the ministerial working group leaders prepare a first draft with the external expert before submitting them for further input to the teachers' working group and ultimately to the impulse group, which elicits input from the school leaders (and their teachers'). For a more detailed discussion of the core curricula's revision and implementation, see Chapters 2 and 4.

For the second and third stages of secondary education, core curricula have been developed for German as a language of instruction, physical education, mathematics, sciences, history, geography and French

as a first foreign language, English as a second foreign language, Dutch as a third foreign language, ethics, school-based career preparation and orientation, and for nursing assistants. Where applicable, the core curricula are differentiated for the different pathways: general education, vocational education and the transitional and qualifying classes in technical education.

Every subject's core curriculum contains a chapter on the concept of competency-oriented pedagogy, a chapter on the subject's contribution to the attainment of general and subject-specific competencies, expectations for subject-specific competencies to be attained at the beginning and end of each stage, and a chapter with methodological and didactic recommendations for high-quality lessons. The core curricula also contain broad suggestions for contents (*Inhaltskontexte*), but teachers and schools are encouraged to design their own lesson plans and emphasise different aspects within these suggestions to develop the competencies.

At the pre-primary level, developmental goals (*Entwicklungsziele*) have been in place for all schools since 2002. They describe the skills that students should attain before entering primary school and serve as a basis for the activity plan (*Aktivitätenplan*) that serves as a pedagogical reference in pre-primary schools of the GUW and OSU networks (the activity plan does not apply to pre-primary schools of the FSU-network). The pre-primary developmental goals are currently being revised.

The three network providers have the option to develop their own network-wide curricula ("*Lehrpläne*") in compliance with the system-wide core curricula, but have generally opted not to do so for those subjects where system-wide core curricula had already been developed. For subjects where no core curricula exist, the GUW network uses the curricula developed by the Community schools in the French Community of Belgium their network-wide curricula instead.[16]

Curricula for 21st century skills

Globalisation and rapid changes in technology are accelerating social, economic, and environmental challenges worldwide, but also provide opportunities for human advancement. In order to thrive under these changing circumstances and to shape their own future in holistic, inclusive, and sustainable ways, education systems must equip citizens with a wide range of skills and the ability to apply their knowledge in unknown and evolving circumstances. The skills needed to successfully navigate the 21st century include cognitive and meta-cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking, creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation); social and emotional skills (e.g. empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration); and practical and physical skills (e.g. using new information and communication technology devices) (OECD, 2020[19]).

Governments across the OECD recognise the importance of developing these 21st century skills through schooling. Over the past decades, many of them have therefore engaged in reforms to update their curricula to account for the changing demands placed on future students. By 2015, for example, the majority of OECD education systems had included explicit references to the development of social and emotional skills in general and specific skills (e.g. achieving goals, working with others or managing emotions) in particular, both in their system-wide objectives and in their national curricula (OECD, 2015, p. 97[20]). In many cases, these reforms have been guided by student profiles, or visions articulating the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values students should achieve at school, which have often focused on concepts such as student agency, co-agency and their transformative competencies (e.g. creating new value, taking responsibility, and reconciling tensions, dilemmas, trade-offs and contradictions) (OECD, 2020[19]). Nevertheless, many OECD countries provide less guidance for teachers on how to best teach these skills and design their lessons so as to enhance students' social and emotional development (OECD, 2015, p. 109[20]).

All of the German-speaking Community's core curricula make reference to the development of students' social and personal competencies, including the development of self-confidence, empathy, critical thinking, collaboration etc.[17] In addition, they emphasise the concept of media and information competency (*Informations- und Medienkompetenz*, IMK) as a transversal set of skills to be developed across subjects

from the first year of primary school to the end of secondary education. To support teachers in fostering media and information competency, the Ministry provides them with a teachers' guide (*IMK-Leitfaden*), developed in 2013, as well as a list of learning objectives for each stage of education and corresponding learning materials (MDG, 2013[21]).[18] The guide complements the core curricula and is intended to provide a richer description of the expected learning outcomes students are expected to obtain and to support teachers from all subjects to integrate relevant material into their lessons. A similar guide has been developed for the promotion of civic education across subjects and the Institute for Civic Education (*Institut für Demokratiepädagogik*, IDP) at the AHS has been charged with developing relevant materials and professional development opportunities for teachers.

School projects, school development plans and school-based curricula

Schools must meet a number of conditions in order to be recognised by the German-speaking Community's authorities and to be eligible for public subsidies. Schools need to comply with a number of regulations to ensure that their facilities, equipment and staff fulfil a range of quality standards. All recognised schools also need to develop a school project (*Schulprojekt*), which forms the basis for mandatory external evaluations every five years (MDG, 2022[8]) and which contains the following elements:

- An assessment of the school's current state of development.
- The school's assessment concept (*Leistungskonzept*), its professional learning concept (*Weiterbildungskonzept*) and its means of involving students and parents in the school life.
- A statement on the school's pedagogical vision and guiding values.
- The school development plan (*Schulentwicklungsplan*) and implementation programme (*Ausführungsprogramm*), which formulates the school's development goals, reports on the steps that have been taken to attain them, assesses the school's progress towards them and formulates new development goals.
- The school-based curriculum (see below).

The school projects need to be developed in alignment with the educational projects (*Erziehungsprojekt*) developed by each of the three network providers. The educational projects provide an opportunity for the networks to develop their own pedagogical profile, methods and approach, in compliance with a broader set of societal objectives for education (*Gesellschaftsprojekt*), which were formulated for the entire Community and passed by the Parliament.

The school-based curricula (*schulinternes Curriculum*) are developed based on the centrally defined core curricula and each school's educational project. The school-based curricula are comprised of subject curricula (*Fachcurricula*), which describe the didactic approach, teaching contents and assessment pratices for each subject taught at the school, as well as "partial curricula" (*Teilcurricula*), which describe to the school's approach to teaching selected inter-disciplinary competencies. The school-based curricula are intended to be developed in teams and should be explicitly oriented towards the development of competencies, replacing the traditionally used material distribution plans (*Stoffverteilungspläne*) (MDG, 2016[22]).

Student assessment and examinations

The development of school-based formative and summative assessment practices is the responsibility of the school providers and school leadership. From the first year of primary school, students are assessed on a continuous basis throughout the year, usually at the end of learning units. These assessments can take a range of formats, including presentations, written assignments and group projects. In addition, network providers can organise exams twice a year in December and June at the secondary level (during the first stage of secondary education, the GUW schools administer only one exam period in June), as well

as additional dates in August for those who failed their first exams. The frequency of exams in primary education is not centrally regulated and most primary schools organise one exam at the end of Year 6.

The different forms of summative assessment should be guided by the competency levels described in the core curricula and form the basis of students' biannual formal reports. They also inform students' certification at the end of primary or secondary school, as well as the decision whether students can be promoted to the next grade, which is taken by the class council (*Klassenrat*) drawing on students' assessment results and their personal development.

Teachers are also expected to conduct regular formative assessments, but it is not regulated by a central policy framework and school providers and teachers determine their methodology (MDG, 2022[8]). The German-speaking Community is among a minority of OECD countries that do not conduct central examinations, i.e. standardised assessments that have a formal consequence for students or affecting students' grades or certification, at any level of education (OECD, 2013, p. 155[23]).

In addition to the school-based summative and formative assessment, students in the German-speaking Community participate in a number of standardised tests with no stakes that are conducted at specific points over the course of their time in school. Each year, the Community administers tests for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF) to assess students' competency in French as a foreign language. The DELF tests are administered to students in Year 6, the last Year of primary school (Level A2), and in Year 6 of technical secondary education (Level B1), Year 7 of vocational secondary education (Level B1), Year 6 of general secondary education and transition classes of technical secondary education (Level B2), or in Year 3 of students' apprenticeship (Level B1 or B2).

Since 2008/09, students in the German-speaking Community, alongside students in Germany, have participated in comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in Year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in Year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8). In 2019, the VERA-3 test assessed language skills and the VERA-8 test assessed mathematics skills. Participating school can use their VERA results for diagnostic purposes, to benchmark their students' learning levels and to target their school improvement initiatives. VERA assessments do not have stakes for students and its results are not used for international comparisons,

The German-speaking Community also regularly participates in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which provides the Community with additional international comparative results on students' performance (see a discussion of the results below). However, in contrast to the French and Flemish Communities, the German-speaking Community does not participate in international assessments at the primary level (e.g. the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS] and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS] of 4th grade students).

School evaluation

Since 2009, the internal and the external evaluation of schools has been compulsory and an important level for school improvement and quality assurance in the German-speaking Community (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1998[15]). The external evaluation is carried out by a specialised unit within the AHS, which closely co-operation with the school, the school inspectorate and school advisory services.

Internal school evaluation

Internal school evaluations are carried out at least once every three years and may cover specific topics decided by the school council (*Pädagogischer Rat*) or the network provider. The goal of the internal evaluation is to assess the school's progress towards the goals defined in its school development plan (*Schulentwicklungsplan*) and, if necessary, to inform adjustments of the school's structure, methods and

activities (see Chapter 4). The Community's authorities ensure that the internal evaluation has taken place (MDG, 2022[8]). The external school evaluation team can support schools in their internal evaluation.

Principals' responses in the PISA 2018 survey confirm that the great majority of secondary schools engage in self-evaluation processes. While all principals reported that their school has a written specification of its curricular profile and educational goals, however, only two thirds of students (66%) attended a school that specified performance standards for their students in writing (compared to 78% on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.8.11[13]). Compared to other OECD education systems, there are also fewer secondary schools in the German-speaking Community that systematically collect data for quality assurance purposes (see Figure 2.6 in Chapter 2). The system's collection and use of data is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

External school evaluation and school inspection

Since 2009, schools in the German-speaking Community have been subject to an external evaluation carried out every five years by the respective unit within the AHS. It evaluates whether schools fulfil their societal objectives and evaluates their performance based on criteria related to the school's results, the quality of teaching, the school culture, school leadership and management, the professionalism of teaching staff, and the school's improvement strategy.

The external evaluation process has been reformed in the 2016/17 school year, with a view to involve schools earlier and more closely in the process, e.g. by deciding on the date of the evaluation visits with the external evaluation team. The reform also alleviated the administrative burden on schools by reducing the number of documents they need to prepare.

The external school evaluation now takes place in two phases. The first phase consists of a dialogue between the school and the evaluation team. Following an initial conversation, the school shares a number of documents that form part of the school project, including the latest versions of its development plan and school curriculum, its approach to formative and summative assessment (*Leistungskonzept*), as well as a professional learning concept (*Weiterbildungskonzept*), in order to prepare the main evaluation. Nine weeks after the initial conversation, the evaluation team meets the school leadership for a second preparatory discussion to agree on the organisation and timing of the main evaluation visit as well as the focus areas of the evaluation.

The second phase of the external evaluation consists of a 3-5 day main evaluation in which the evaluation team visits the school premises, conducts interviews with key stakeholders and observes lessons. The evaluation is guided by an orientation framework for school quality (*Orientierungsrahmen Schulqualität*), which contains compulsory criteria, as well as optional criteria whose selection is decided by the school (Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien Abteilung für Externe Evaluation, 2016[24]). The criteria are derived from a quality framework (*Qualitätstableau*) developed and used in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia and are currently in the process of being revised. The assessment of the quality of teaching is based on lesson observations in which external evaluators assess whether a series of standardised quality indicators "apply" or "do not apply".[19] The evaluation also includes a questionnaire distributed to students, non-teaching personnel and parents. The revisions of the evaluation process will focus on digital change in teaching and learning, bilingual and foreign language instruction and the latest empirical evidence on high-quality teaching (MDG, 2022[8]).

At the end of the process, the external evaluation prepares a report that is shared with the government, the Ministry, the school provider and the evaluated school. If desired, the school leadership can invite the evaluation team for a feedback conference six weeks after receiving the draft evaluation report. After the report has been finalised, the school leadership has six months to submit a school development plan detailing the steps the school will take to address the shortcomings identified during the evaluation. The development plan is sent to the school inspectorate and – on an optional basis – to the external evaluation team and the school development advisory service.

Pre-primary schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium are not separately evaluated, since many of them only count one or a few staff members. Instead, pre-primary schools are evaluated alongside the primary schools in which they are integrated and the evaluation team seeks to provide suggestions relevant to the pre-primary offer in both its final report and the feedback conversation. Pre-primary schools may also be suggested to use the school development counselling service of the AHS's advisory service if additional support may be needed.

In addition to the evaluation of individual schools, the external school evaluation is required to publish regular monitoring reports on the system-wide strengths and weaknesses identified through its school evaluations every three years. Following a first report in 2010, a second report covering the period 2010-13 was presented in 2014 (Breuer, Müllender and Schieren, 2014[25]). The reporting lapsed during the period 2014-15 and resumed in 2021 with a report covering the period 2016-20 (Cormann and Goor, 2021[26]). The school inspectorate complements the external evaluation's findings with the observations derived from its inspection of schools' development plans, which are submitted as part of the school projects (MDG, 2022[8]).

The school inspectorate, which is under the authority of the Ministry's department of pedagogy, is responsible for ensuring that schools abide by administrative and legal standards and contributes to quality assurance and school development in a number of ways. The inspectorate checks whether schools achieve the goals defined in their school development plans, whether their school-internal curricula are aligned with the core curricula and whether they have sufficient teaching materials and equipment. In addition, the inspectorate conducts summative evaluations of teachers before they can obtain permanent contracts (see Chapter 4) and oversees the development and implementation of core curricula. Members of the school inspectorate also participate in the oral feedback that schools receive at the end of their external evaluation. [20]

Advisory services

The school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*) provides schools with a range of services aimed at developing and implementing school improvement projects. This can include analysis, advice, coaching, facilitation and training. The external evaluation may refer schools to development counsellors to receive support in working on their school improvement project.

The Community's pedagogical advisory services (*Fachberatungen*) provide professional support to teachers and school leaders. School leaders, groups of teachers or individual teachers can call upon the advisory services to receive support on pedagogical and methodological questions, for example related to the planning of lessons on a specific topic or the implementation of core curricula. The advisory service for primary education is situated in the AHS and is organised into different subject-specific groups, as well as a group for pre-primary education. Each group brings together specialists from the AHS, staff from the Ministry's department for pedagogy and a teacher. At the time of the review, the pedagogical advisory services for secondary education were in a piloting stage and situated in the Ministry's department for pedagogy (MDG, 2022[8]).

Afterschool support, enrichment and youth assistance

The Ministry runs or supports several programmes offering extra-curricular enrichment in the fields of arts, theatre, and sports.[21] In addition, a variety of external actors provide services that complement the educational and extra-curricular offer of schools. Parents and schools usually approach these providers directly and there is little external co-ordination between them (MDG, 2022[8]). The main providers include *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, the ZFP's competency centre (*Kompetenzzentrum*), the so-called "homework schools" (*Hausaufgabenschulen*), the Time-Out centres, various sport clubs and youth clubs, the music academy, the Institute for Civic Education at the AHS and others.

Homework support

The education system in the German-speaking Community has a strong homework culture. The proportion of students reporting help from their teachers in completing their homework has increased in recent years. While in 2015, only 37% of 15-year-old students in PISA reported that staff provides help with homework (considerably below the OECD average of 60%), this proportion had risen to 69% in 2018 (OECD, 2016, p. Table B2.II.47[27]). In several OECD countries, homework support is targeted to those students most at risk of falling behind or unlikely to receipt his help elsewhere in order to reduce inequalities in education outcomes (OECD, 2020, p. 59[28]). On average across the OECD and in countries such as Australia, Estonia and France, students in disadvantaged schools were more likely to report receiving homework support than their peers in advantaged schools in PISA 2018. This was not the case in Belgium, as a whole (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B1.6.19[13]).

Most students in the German-speaking Community (71.5%) also reported having a room at their school where they could do their homework (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.6.19[13]). Nevertheless, a significant proportion of homework support in the German-speaking Community is provided outside of schools. Several providers offer homework support in so-called homework schools.[22] These services are open to all students in primary and secondary schools free of charge of for a small fee of about EUR 1 per hour or EUR 5 a week. The Parliament has commissioned a study to evaluate the extent to which students rely on afterschool support, whether parents helped with students' homework and whether there were any socio-economic discrepancies either type of support (Moroni, 2020[29]). Even though no figures are available, it is assumed that students in the German-speaking Community – as in many other European countries – have increasingly drawn on paid tutoring services, including those of private tutoring institutes, during and after the suspension of in-person teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Zhang and Bray, 2020[30]). The accessibility of homework support is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

Time-Out

Since the school year 2018/19, the Time-Out centre offers supervision to youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of formal full-time or part-time education and apprenticeships due to socio-emotional and behavioural problems. The Time-Out centre is located in the ZFP's competency centre and enrolled 15 people in the 2018/19 school year.[23] The Time-Out centre aims to support those who enrol in reflecting on their educational or professional goals, to build their long-term motivation and to help them develop the competencies needed to pursue these goals with a view to reintegrate them into an educational or professional pathway after a limited period of time.[24] Those who join the Time-Out programme remain institutionally affiliated with a secondary school or one of the Centres for Vocational and Educational Training in SMEs (ZAWM) in Eupen and St. Vith. According to the Ministry, young people who join Time-Out remain in the programme for about 12 months on average.

Kaleido Ostbelgien

Kaleido Ostbelgien, the "Centre for the Healthy Development of Children and Youth", was created in 2014, resulting from the merger of a range of previously separate services, including the previous psycho-medical social centres (PMS), the school health centres and the child and family services. Kaleido is a multidisciplinary and intersectoral institution with a headquarter in Eupen and four local service points in Eupen, St. Vith, Kelmis and Büllingen.[25] Its work focuses on preventive (not therapeutic) work related to the healthy development of children and young adults aged 0-20. This encompasses information campaigns, counselling services and support (including pedagogical consultations) for students, parents, teachers and school leaders, career guidance, and the assessment of special education needs. (Kaleido's role in supporting students with SEN is described in detail in Chapter 3). Kaleido's counselling work is carried out by inter-disciplinary teams of social workers, psychologists, nurses, and doctors. Kaleido's services are free of charge for families (MDG, 2022[8]).

Performance of the education system

Education performance

Process quality in pre-primary education

There is growing evidence on the importance of high-quality pre-primary education and its positive impact on children's development (OECD, 2018[31]; Heckman, 2006[32]), including early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision for children under age 3 (Cadima et al., 2020[33]), particularly for the most disadvantaged children (Kottelenberg and Lehrer, 2017[34]). Students who had attended pre-primary education for longer also showed a better reading performance in PISA 2018 at age 15. On average across OECD countries, the mean reading score of students who had attended pre-primary education for one year (471 points), two years (491 points) or three years or more (493 points) was higher than the score of students who had not attended or had attended for less than one year (444 points). This difference was even more pronounced in Belgium as a whole, where students who had attended pre-primary education for three years or more scored 501 points compared to 391, for those who had attended less than a year (OECD, 2020, pp. 49, Table V.B1.2.4[13]).

However, the benefits of pre-primary education depend on the quality of the interactions between children and staff and children's exposure to stimulating developmental activities, among other factors (OECD, 2019[35]). Little information is available on children's learning and development outcomes at the pre-primary level in the German-speaking Community. Nevertheless, pre-primary schools are evaluated alongside the primary schools with which they are connected and data are regularly collected on several aspects related to process quality, such as the ratio of children to adults and group sizes in early-childhood education. Across the Community, there were on average 17.2 children per class in pre-primary education in the 2020/21 school year (MDG, 2022[8]).

In 2014, the Ministry commissioned a study on children's German language competency at key stage of schooling, including year 3 of pre-primary school (as well as years 3 and 6 of primary school). The study tested the passive and active vocabulary, listening comprehension, grammar and verbal expression of a sample of students. The study identified low levels of German language competency among a significant proportion of children and, overall, significant heterogeneity. Particularly children whose families did not speak German at home (and to a lesser extent whose families spoke German and other languages at home) had lower levels of German language competency at the end of pre-primary school.[26] Further improving language education and promoting multilingualism has since been included as one of the goals of the regional development concept for 2019-2024 (REK III) (MDG, 2019[36]).

Education performance is good overall but there are few top-performers and an increasing share of low-achievers

In 2018, 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community that participated in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performed statistically significantly above the OECD average in mathematics (505 vs. 489) and at the average in science (483 score points vs. 489) as well as reading (483 vs. 487). Students in the German-speaking Community performed similarly to those in the French Community, but worse than those in the Flemish Community in all three subjects. They scored at the same level (i.e. statistically not distinguishable) as students in France, but fared worse than German students in reading and science and Dutch students in science and mathematics. Compared to 2015, 15-year-old students in 2018 performed significantly worse in reading and science, losing 18 and 22 score points respectively, while the performance in mathematics remained stable (OECD, 2019[37]). This drop in performance can be related to changes in education policy, the learning environment (both in and outside of school), the composition of the student population or a combination of all three.

In recent years, the share of low achievers has increased in reading and science with around 20% of 15-year-old students failing to perform at Level 2, which is considered the baseline level of proficiency that is required to participate fully in a knowledge-based society, compared to around 14% in 2015 (see Table 1.3). While the share of low achievers remains below the OECD average across the three domains of the PISA test, this implies that a significant proportion of students do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills and cannot engage in more complex reasoning to solve the kinds of problems that are routinely faced by today's adults in modern societies (OECD, 2019, p. 136[37]).

Table 1.3. Selected indicators of educational performance and equity, based on PISA 2018

	OECD average	German-speaking Community (2018)	German-speaking Community (2015)	French Community (2018)	Flemish Community (2018)
Percentage of top performers					
Mathematics	10.9	9.1	9.0 (17.3 in 2006)	11.8	18.8
Reading	8.7	5.4	5.4 / (9.7 in 2006)	6.7	11.7
Science	6.8	3.2	6.1 (11.8 in 2006)	5.0	10.4
Percentage of low achievers					
Mathematics	24.0	15.1	17.1 (16.9 in 2006)	22.8	17.3
Reading	22.6	20.6	14.3 (19.3 in 2006)	23.8	19.3
Science	22.0	20.0	14.2 (15.5 in 2006)	22.6	18.0
Difference in performance between the 90th and 10th percentiles (in score points)					
Mathematics	235	207	210 (251 in 2006)	246	254
Reading	260	243	224 (263 in 2006)	263	275
Science	244	233	222 (254 in 2006)	251	266
Percentage of variance in student performance explained by students' ESCS					
Mathematics	13.8	10.0	m	19.6	21.8
Reading	12.0	5.1	m	16.2	17.3
Science	12.8	7.0	m	18.8	20.0
Percentage of resilient students (reading)*	11.3	14.1	m	7.1	10.7
Difference in reading performance between immigrant and non-immigrant students after accounting for gender and ESCS (in score points)	24	32	m	11	32
Between school variation in reading performance (as percentage of total)	29.0	19.1	m	32.6	45.5
Within school variation in reading performance (as percentage of total)	70.8	65.2	m	60.6	60.3
Percentage of 15-year-old students that have repeated a year at least once	11.4	28.4	30.5	41.1	23.2

*Differences are not statistically significant

Note: Top performers = students performing at PISA Level 5 and above; Low achievers = students performing below PISA Level 2; ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status; Resilient students = students in bottom quarter of ESCS who perform among the top 25% of students after accounting for ESCS; PISA 2006 scores for the German-speaking Community were not internationally adjudicated.

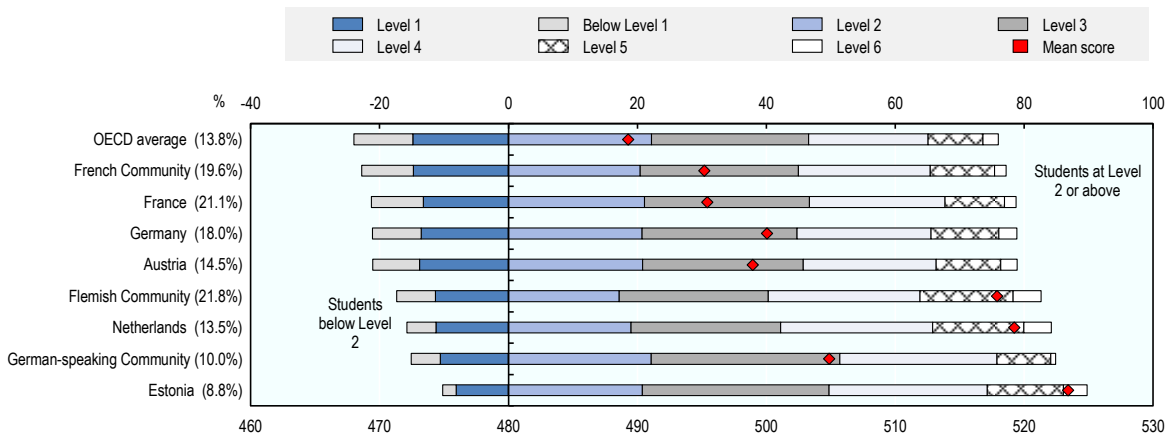
Sources: OECD (2019[38]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en, Tables II.B2.3/4/5, II.B1.2.3/4 and II.B1.3.1; OECD (2020[13]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B1.2.9 and V.B2.2.9; OECD (2016[39]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en, Table B2.I.1/5/9; OECD (2016[27]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en, Table B2.II.33.

The gap between high-performing and low-performing students in the German-speaking Community of Belgium has narrowed significantly between 2006 and 2018 and is below the OECD average as well as

the gaps observed in the Flemish and French Communities. As can be seen in Figure 1.6, this narrow performance distribution is not only explained by the small share of students at the bottom of the performance spectrum, but also by a relatively small share of top-performing students. In 2018, the share of students performing at proficiency Level 5 or above was close to the OECD average in mathematics (9.1% vs. 10.9%) and below the OECD average in reading (5.4% vs. 8.7%) and science (3.2% vs. 6.8%). The share of top-performers was also smaller than in the Flemish and French Communities, suggesting that a smaller share of young people in the German-speaking Community can successfully use their reading, mathematics and science competences to creatively and autonomously apply their knowledge to navigate through a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment. It is particularly noteworthy that this share of top-performers has halved in all three domains since 2006 (see Table 1.3 and Annex 1.A).

Figure 1.6. Students' proficiency in mathematics, 2018

15-year-old students at each proficiency level and mean score (% of variance explained by ESCS in brackets)



Note: ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status; Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who performed at or above Level 2.
Source: OECD (2019[37]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en, Tables I.B2.9 and I.B1.9.

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The acquisition of French-language skills is an important condition for students' success in the local labour market and for students going on to pursue higher education in the French Community of Belgium. Authorities therefore emphasise the goal that all students should leave school with a good level of French language. The results of the latest DELF test in 2018/19 saw 81% of students at the end of primary school achieving their set goals (level A2), 78% of students at the end of vocational secondary education and technical qualifying classes (Level B1) and 80% of students at the end of general secondary education and technical transition classes (Level B2). Results were less satisfying for apprentices among whom participation was low and only 61% of those who took it passed Level B1 or B2 (Alliance Française de Bruxelles-Europe, 2019[40]). Nevertheless, in interviews with teachers and students, the OECD review team formed the impression that not all students were confident in their French-language skills, in particular their verbal expression, and that some students in secondary education did not feel adequately prepared to use French in a professional context or engage in French-language higher education.

Performance differences across schools are modest but there are considerable differences between tracks

Secondary schools in the German-speaking Community are more similar to one another, both in terms of their academic performance and their social composition, than in many OECD countries. Only 19.1% of the variation in performance is observed between schools, compared to 45.5% in the Flemish Community, 32.6% in the French Community and 29.0% on average across the OECD. This implies that, on average, one may observe more diversity in the performance of students who attend the same school than between two groups of students attending different schools.

The OECD's index of social inclusion further confirms that schools are more integrated in terms of their students' socio-economic profile than most OECD countries (OECD, 2019, p. Table II.B2.9[38]). Nevertheless, as can be expected in a highly differentiated and hierarchical school system, there are considerable performance differences across tracks. On average, 15-year-old students in the vocational track perform 93 score points lower in reading than their peers in general or modular tracks, significantly more than the OECD average of 68 points and the gap, for example, in Germany (68 points) (OECD, 2019, p. Table II.B2.16[38]). Socio-economic differences in student performance and inequities in the German-speaking Community's school system are discussed in Chapter 4 on equity and inclusion.

Access and participation

Access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is widespread

Although precise data on enrolment in early childhood education and care in the German-speaking Community is not available,[27] participation at age 3 is estimated to be high. In 2018, 87.4% of 15-year-old students in the Community reported to have attended pre-primary education for at least three years, significantly above the OECD average of 56.4% and up from 81.6% in 2015 (OECD, 2016, p. Table B2.II.49[27]). In the rest of Belgium, as in most OECD countries with available data, enrolment rates of children aged 3 to 5 years have expanded over the past decade and reached near universal coverage in 2018 (98.5%) (OECD, 2020, pp. 183, Table B2.2[41]). Between PISA 2015 and 2018, the share of students who reported having attended pre-primary education for three years or more increased in 41 of 54 OECD countries and economies with available data (OECD, 2020, p. 49[13]). Given the benefits of pre-primary education, it is important to consider inequities in the access to and use of ECEC services. On average across OECD countries in 2018, 10% of socio-economically disadvantaged 15-year-olds had attended pre-primary education for less than one year or not at all, compared to only 3% of advantaged students. Although less pronounced, these differences also existed in Belgium as a whole (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.2.1[13]).

The German-speaking Community has announced to lower the admission age for pre-primary school from three years to two and a half years, starting in 2024/25. Increasing enrolment at the early ages, particularly among low income and immigrant children can be a challenge, as can be seen in neighbouring countries and education systems. In the Flemish Community, for example, enrolment of children under the age of three is high, at 60%, but the gap in participation for children with a mother with a tertiary degree (65%) and without one (44%) is significant and twice as large as the EU average (OECD, 2018[42]). To increase enrolment among immigrant students the Flemish Community has introduced financial incentives to boost attendance for 3 and 4-year-olds in 2019 by granting a premium to schools for each enrolled child of non-Dutch speaking parents (OECD, 2020, p. 56[28]; European Commission, 2019[43]).

Early school leaving has been reduced but grade repetition rates remain high

Grade repetition is relatively frequent in the German-speaking Community, particularly in some schools. The Community's first regional development concept 2009-2014 (REK I) had included the target to reduce

the share of 15-year-olds enrolled below their age's typical grade level to the OECD average by 2020 (MDG, 2011[44]). Yet, the rate of grade repetition remains high and the Community's authorities do not regularly monitor the incidence of grade repetition as distinct from the share of students who are enrolled at a lower grade level, for other reasons, e.g. because they deferred their primary school entry or switched tracks. PISA 2018 data suggests that, among 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school (OECD, 2020, pp. 308, Table V.B2.2.9[13]). This was significantly above the OECD average of 11.4%. In 2018, 13.0% of 15-year-olds reported to have repeated at least one grade in primary education and 12.6% to have repeated at least once in lower secondary education (compared to 6.7% and 5.5% respectively across the OECD) (see Figure 3.6).

Over the past decades, the Belgian Communities have made progress in reducing early school leaving, reducing the Belgium-wide drop-out rate from over 12% in the early 2000s to 8.6% in 2018, below the EU-wide objective of 10% (Governments of Belgium, 2020[45]). In 2018, according to principals' reports, the proportion of students in the final grade of school who left without a certificate that would allow them to enter post-school education or employment stood at 4.5% across Belgium (slightly below the OECD average of 4.8%) and there were no significant differences based on schools' socio-economic profile. This proportion was slightly lower in the German-speaking Community (3.4%) than in the Flemish or French Community (4.6% and 4.3% respectively) (OECD, 2020, p. Tables V.B1.2.12 and V.B2.2.12[13]).

The German-speaking Community has undertaken a number of efforts to reduce early school leaving in technical and vocational secondary education and students' premature termination of apprenticeships. These include the part-time vocational education, which is aimed at 15 to 18-year-olds who no longer can or wish to follow full-time education and who dropped out or do not fulfil the necessary requirements for an apprenticeship. It offers students another chance to obtain the necessary certificates to progress to the second or third year of vocational education or start an apprenticeship.[28] The *Time-Out* project (described further below) also seeks to prevent drop-out by supporting schools in an advisory capacity and offering to supervise students who left school with a view to reintegrate them at a later point.

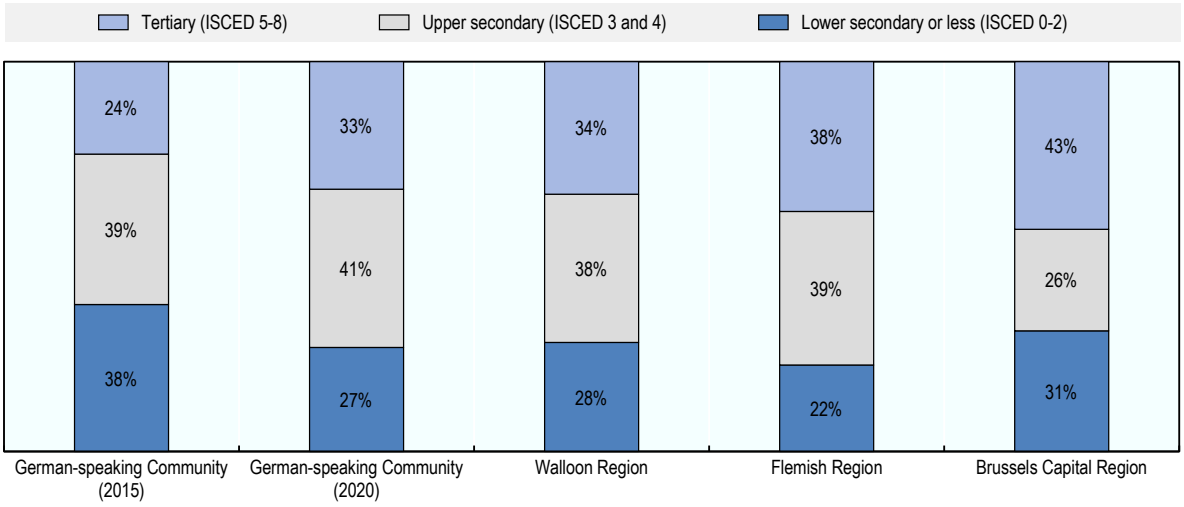
Another project is the BIDA (*Berufliche Integration durch Ausbildungsbegleitung in der dualen Ausbildung*), a one-year pre-vocational programme supported by the European Social Fund. The programme combines three days of in-company training and two days of school-based learning per week and seeks to equip students with the social and personal skills needed to start an apprenticeship (Governments of Belgium, 2020[45]).

Attainment and labour market outcomes

Belgium as a whole has a highly qualified population and its general level of education has gradually increased over the past generation. In 2020, four out of five (80%) Belgians aged 25-64 had at least an upper secondary education (close to the OECD average of 83%) and 42% held a tertiary education degree (compared to an OECD average of 40% (OECD, 2021, pp. 48, Table A1.1[9]). According to the national labour force survey, the level of attainment in the German-speaking Community's working age population is slightly lower than the rest of the country. In 2020, 74% of 15-64-year-olds held at least an upper secondary qualification, but only 33% held a tertiary qualification (compared to 34% in the Walloon Region, 38% in the Flemish Region and 43% in the Brussels capital region) (see Figure 1.7). Nevertheless, the level of tertiary attainment in the German-speaking Community has improved significantly in recent years, from only 24% in this age group in 2015 (MDG, 2022[8]).

Figure 1.7. Level of educational attainment in the German-speaking Community and the Belgian Regions, 2020

Population aged 15-64



Note: Estimates based on a sample for the national labour force survey; All values for 2020, except where indicated; Values for the Walloon Region include the German-speaking Community.
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2022[8]) and Statistics Belgium (2021), *Education level of the Belgian population*, https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/werk-opleiding/opleidingen-en-onderwijs/onderwijsniveau#figures (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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Among the younger generation of 25-34 year-olds across Belgium, 86% held at least an upper secondary qualification (the same as the OECD average), and 49% held a tertiary qualification in 2020 (compared to an OECD average of 45%) (OECD, 2021, pp. 49, Table A1.2[9]). In 2018, youth unemployment (among 15-24-year-olds) in Belgium stood at 15.8% (close to the EU average of 15.2%), but showed significant variations across the three Communities (OECD, 2020, p. 81[28]). According to national statistics, the unemployment rate among under 25-year-olds in the German-speaking Community stood at 8.1% in December 2019, significantly below the national rate (19%) and those in the French Community (28%) and the Flemish Community (13%) (Arbeitsamt der DG, 2020[46]). However, the relatively high outward mobility of young adults makes it difficult to track students' labour market outcomes and trajectories beyond secondary education.

Given the limited opportunities for higher education in the German-speaking Community, many prospective students leave to pursue higher education in the French-speaking Community or (increasingly, especially in the northern part of the Community) in Germany. According to anecdotal information from the employment agency, many students also choose to pursue apprenticeships or work in Germany after completing their school education, although some of them continue to reside in the German-speaking Community. While no data is available, the proportion of young adults leaving the German-speaking Community after completing their studies can be assumed to be substantial. At the same time, surveys among young adults suggest that many of the young adults leaving the German-speaking Community plan to return after completing their studies or after having gained some professional experience abroad (Doerflinger and Knipprath, 2018, pp. 18, 61[47]). Since the employment agency can only track the labour market integration of recent graduates who remain in the German-speaking Community (and there are obstacles to the exchange of data between Communities and with neighbouring countries), it is difficult to

draw reliable conclusions concerning students' labour market outcomes or further education, including potential differences across students groups and educational pathways.[29]

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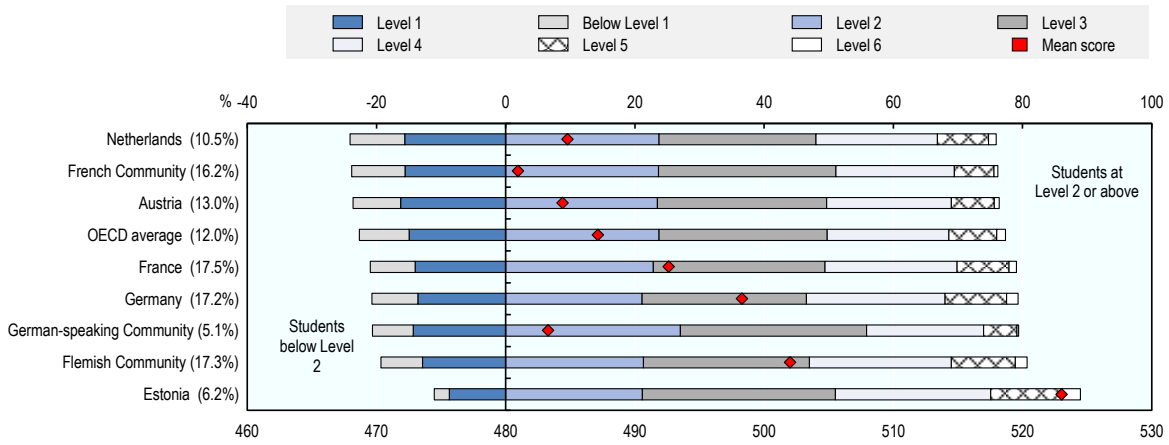
Annex 1.A. Additional Figures

Annex Figure 1.A.1. Students' proficiency in reading, 2018

15-year-old students at each proficiency level and mean score (% of variance explained by ESCS in brackets)



Note: ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status; Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who performed at or above Level 2.
Source: OECD (2019[37]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en, Tables I.B2.5 and I.B1.5.

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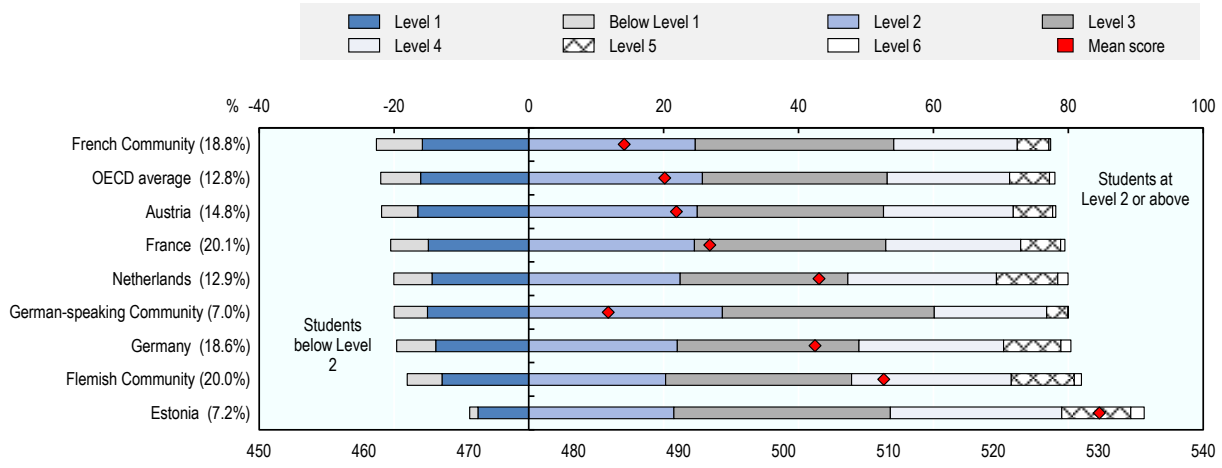
Annex Figure 1.A.2. Students' proficiency in science, 2018

15-year-old students at each proficiency level and mean score (% of variance explained by ESCS in brackets)



Note: ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status; Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who performed at or above Level 2.
Source: OECD (2019[37]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en, Tables I.B2.1 and I.B1.1.

StatLink https://stat.link/nsqz75

Notes

[1] Besides the minister for education and research, the current executive government consists of a Prime Minister, who is also responsible for local administration and finances; a minister for health, social affairs, regional planning and housing; and a minister for culture, sport, employment and media.

[2] MDG (2021) *Organigramm des Ministeriums der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, https://www.ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resources/downloads/divers/Organigramm_MDG_OSB_DE.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[3] Statistics Belgium (2021), *Structure of the Population*, https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/population/structure-population (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[4] Statistics Belgium (2021), *Structure of the Population*, http://www.ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2569/4686_read-32765/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[5] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[6] Eurostat (2021), *Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 3 regions*, https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_10r_3gdp&lang=en (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[7] Statistikportal Ostbelgien (2021), *Bruttowertschöpfung und Bruttoinlandsprodukt*, https://ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2573/4672_read-32726/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[8] Statistikportal Ostbelgien (2021), *Bruttowertschöpfung und Bruttoinlandsprodukt*, https://ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2573/4672_read-32726/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[9] UOE education database (2021), *Enrolment by type of institution*, https://doi.org/10.1787/edu-data-en (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[10] The class council is comprised of the school leadership and all other personnel responsible for a given student.

[11] The members of each school's admissions council are appointed each year by the school leader from among the school's teaching and leadeship staff. The structure and role of Kaleido Ostbelgien, the "Centre for the Healthy Development of Children and Youth", is described in more detail below and in Chapter 3.

[12] Bischöfliches Institut Büllingen, Institut Maria-Goretti St. Vith, Robert-Schuman-Institut Eupen and Technisches Institut St. Vith.

[13] Authors' calculations based on OECD (2021) *Education at a Glance Database*, https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=108594# (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[14] The official title of the 1998 Decree is *Dekret über den Auftrag an die Schulträger und das Schulpersonal sowie über die allgemeinen pädagogischen und organisatorischen Bestimmungen für die Regel- und Förderschulen* [Decree on the mandate of school providers and school staff as well as on general educational and organisational provisions for mainstream and special education schools] (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1998[15]).

[15] All core curricula can be accessed at Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2020), *Rahmenpläne*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2221/4415_read-31778 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[16] Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2021), *Lehrpläne*, https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2488/4417_read-31783/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[17] Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2011), *Rahmenplan Fach Deutsch 1. Fremdsprache*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/PortalData/21/Resources/downloads/schule_ausbildung/schulische_ausbildung/rahmenplaene_neu/RP_Deutsch_erste_Fremdsprache_PRIM.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[18] MDG (2013) *IMK-Leitfaden nach Unterrichtsstufen mit Handreichungen/Materialien für den Unterricht*, http://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2413 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[19] Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (2020), *Kommentierung Unterrichtsbeobachtungsbogen*, https://static.ahs-ostbelgien.be/wp-content/uploads/2001ubb-kommentierung-abteilung-fr-externe-evaluation-deutschsprachig.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[20] For a full description of the inspectorate's responsibilities, see Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2013[48]) *Dekret über die Schulinspektion und die Schulentwicklungsberatung (25. Juni 2012)* [Decree on the school inspection and the school development counselling service]

[21] Examples include the programme *Kultur macht Schule* (http://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3964/7104_read-41299/), the *Schulsportprogramm* (https://www.ostbelgiensport.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3388/5925_read-36721/), and a drama pedagogy project (*Theaterpädagogik*) run by AGORA and subsidised by the Education Minister.

[22] Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2021), *Familienportal - Hausaufgabenhilfe*, https://www.ostbelgienfamilie.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5917/10102_read-54896/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[23] During a pilot phase carried out from 2010/11 to 2017/18, 10 students participated in Time-Out on average. (Figures provided by the Ministry).

[24] Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2021), *Time-out*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3529/6363_read-37748/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[25] Kaleido (2021). Tätigkeitsbericht 2021, https://www.kaleido-ostbelgien.be/fileadmin/template/PDF/dokumente/ueberuns/Taetigkeitsbericht_Kaleido_2020_01.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[26] The results of the study (McElvany [2014], "Sprachstanderhebung in der DG Belgien 2014: Kindergarten") have been shared with the authors.

[27] The Ministry of the German-speaking Community estimates enrolment at age 3 to be around 96%, but there is some uncertainty around the enrolment rates since some students residing in the German-speaking Community attend pre-primary education in the French Community and vice versa. On average across the OECD, 87% of students aged 3-5 were enrolled in ECEC or primary education in 2019 (OECD, 2021, p. Table B2.1[9]).

[28] Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2021), *Berufliche Ausbildung*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2240/4392_read-31714/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[29] Arbeitsamt Ostbelgien (2021), *SAVE - Schulabgängervermittlung*, https://adg.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5403/9349_read-50719/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

2 Governing and funding the education system

This chapter covers the governance, organisation, and funding of school education in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. It analyses the distribution of responsibilities for financing and administering schools in the Community, the overall education budget and the distribution of funding across levels of education, school types, school networks and resource categories. The chapter also considers the role of strategic planning and the use of data to steer education policy in the Community. Finally, the chapter analyses the organisation and scope of the educational provision, the co-ordination between sectors (general and vocational education) and students' transitions across levels of education and into the labour market.

Context and main features

Governance of the education system and the school networks

As described in Chapter 1, the organisation and funding of schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium is subject to a complex governance arrangement and, despite the Community's small size, distinguished by the co-existence of three separate school networks: The Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW), the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU), and the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU).

The legal framework for all three school networks is set by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community. The Ministry of the German-speaking Community (*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, MDG) is responsible for developing education policy and overseeing its implementation in all schools, as well as distributing most of the public funding for education. The MDG has three departments responsible for the school sector: The department for education and the organisation of instruction (*Fachbereich [FB] Ausbildung und Unterrichtsorganisation*), the department for pedagogy (*FB Pädagogik*) and the department for school personnel (*Fachbereich Unterrichtspersonal*).[1]

Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector and beyond for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019[1]) and the government's[2] working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]).

The Minister of Education and Scientific Research is one of four ministers comprising the German-speaking Community's executive government for the legislative period 2019-24. In addition to the minister's community-wide responsibilities, the Minister of Education and Scientific Research serves as the school provider (*Schulträger*) of the GUW school network. The nine municipalities serve as the providers of the OSU schools, while the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools (*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der DG*, BSDG) acts as the provider of the nine FSU schools.[3]

School providers are responsible for formulating an "educational project" (*Erziehungsprojekt*) that sets the framework for individual schools' projects. The providers are also responsible for the organisation of learning and pedagogical methods applied in their schools, for appointing the school council and for the construction and maintenance of school buildings. The providers also recruit staff for their schools, even though salaries are paid directly by the ministry (Eurydice, 2010[3]; Eurydice, 2020[4]). Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a comparatively high degree of autonomy in their choice of pedagogical and assessment methods, the organisation of instruction (e.g. the formation of class sizes), as well as their use of resources (see further below).

All recognised schools in the German-speaking Community are publicly funded through the Community budget, either directly (in the case of GUW schools) or subsidised (in the case of OSU and FSU schools). To be recognised and subsidised by the Community, schools must have their "school project" (including their school development plan, assessment concept and school-based curricula) approved by the ministry, having a minimum number of students, accepting supervision by the ministry, meeting hygiene and safety standards for their premises, observing the statutory teaching, holiday and public holiday periods and following regulations concerning the recruitment of teachers (MDG, 2022[5]).

A structure of councils permits teachers, parents and students to formally participate in school life. All schools need to appoint a school council (*Pädagogischer Rat*), consisting of the school leader, the deputy and at least five other members of staff (pedagogical, medical or socio-psychological staff). The school council is formed at every school for a period of three years for the pedagogically relevant decision. Parents or legal guardians of students can participate in and shape school life through parent councils (*Elternrat*) although there are no central rules on way in which parent councils' should be involved in school matters.

Although the formation of a parents' council is mandatory, not every school in the Community has a formal parents' representation, due to the difficulty of finding volunteers or other factors. Many of the existing parent councils are networked in the Community's Parents' Association (*Elternbund Ostbelgien V.o.G. / EBOB*). The establishment of an elected student council is compulsory in secondary education while primary schools can ensure students' right to participate in school life by other means (MDG, 2022[5]).

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is committed to the principle of "freedom of education", to maintaining pedagogical diversity and – as part of a multi-lingual country – promoting multilingualism (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015[6]). Like the Flemish and French Communities, it constitutionally guarantees each parent the right to send their child to a school of their choice and allows any legal person the right to set up a school, recruit staff and determine its educational, religious or ideological principles. As a consequence, the German-speaking Community is home to a significant number of publicly-funded private schools (see Chapter 1). In September 2020, 49% of secondary students in the German-speaking Community attended one of the five private secondary schools. This was slightly below the share of private secondary schools in the other Belgian Communities (58%), but significantly above the OECD average of about 19%. At the primary level, which has been dominated historically by the municipal OSU network, private enrolment stood at only 8% in 2020, compared to 54% across the Flemish and French Communities and around 12% on average across the OECD in 2019.[4] At the time of the OECD review, there were no independent private schools (i.e. schools receiving less than half of their core funding from government agencies) in the German-speaking Community.

The public funding of private schools in the FSU network, in its current form, has its historical origins in the 1958 "School Pact", which put an end to disputes between public and private providers that had flared up after the Second World War. The Pact constituted a compromise between Belgium's three major political currents and gave private providers of the FSU network the right to public subsidies (Schifflers, 1994[7]; Eurydice, 2020[4]; MDG, 2008[8]). The freedom of education has resulted in a dense school coverage, guaranteeing a high level of accessibility and short distances between students' schools and their homes, particularly in primary education (Eurydice, 2010[3]). Despite their pedagogical liberties, the educational offer of the three school networks is broadly similar and subject to centrally defined core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015[6]).

Funding of school education

The government of the German-speaking Community receives funding for education from the federal government of Belgium and the government of the Walloon Region (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2014, p. 47[9]) (see Figure 2.4) as part of a lump sum allocation (*Globaldotation*). The German-speaking Community can freely allocate its resources across its areas of expenditure. Additional targeted funding is provided by the Walloon region, for example for digital equipment in selected schools as part of its *École Numérique* programme.[5]

Overall level of expenditure on school education

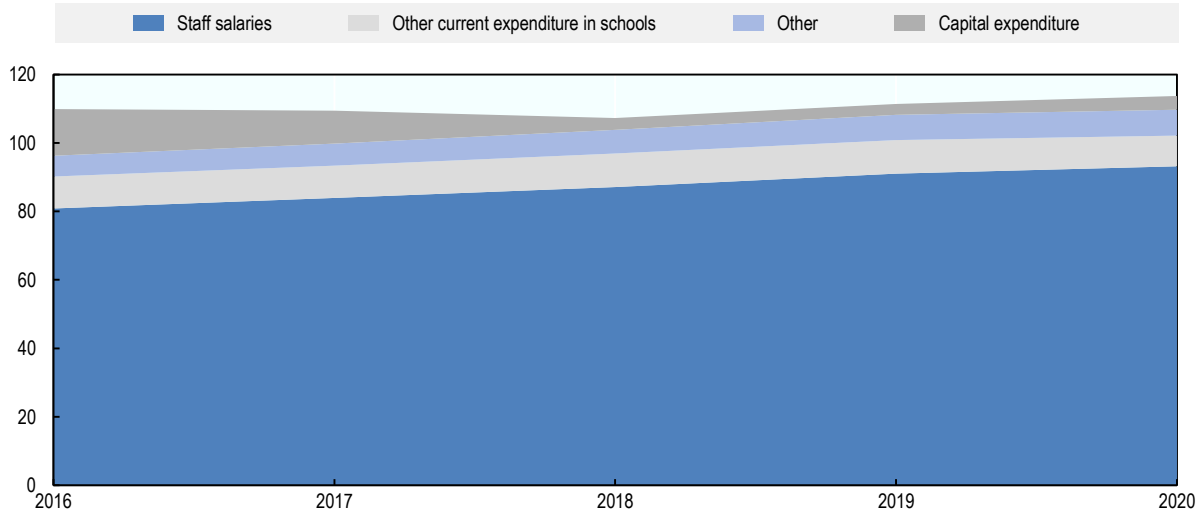
Based on national statistics, the total expenditure on education in the German-speaking Community in 2020 was EUR 119.7 million, of which EUR 113.7 million was spent on pre-primary to upper secondary education (see Figure 2.1). Around 7.3% of this expenditure on school education was undertaken by municipalities and 92.7% by the Community government. As in all OECD education systems, the largest share of the budget was spent on the salaries of teachers and other staff, which accounted for 81.9% of total expenditure. Although methodological differences mean that direct comparisons should be treated with caution, this share of staff expenditure was in line with the OECD average (77%) and slightly below those of the other Belgian Communities (89%) in 2018 (OECD, 2021, pp. 311, Table C6.2[10]).[6] School leaders, teachers, educators, secretarial staff, and other school staff in the German-speaking Community

are paid (or subsidised at 100%) by the ministry, according to a uniform salary scale across the three school networks, including the private FSU network.

Other current expenditure in schools, e.g. on support services, ancillary services like the preparation of student meals, rent for school buildings and other facilities accounted for 7.9% in 2020 (5.3% from the central budget and 2.5% from local budgets) (MDG, 2022[5]). Central and local capital expenditure, i.e. funding for school infrastructure and materials, accounted for 3.5% of overall expenditure in 2020 after accounting for as much as 12.4% in 2016 and 8.8% in 2017 (see Figure 2.1). The remaining 6.7% of expenditure in 2020 included targeted funding for pedagogical projects, student transportation, curriculum development, and the budget of Kaleido, the centre for the healthy development of children and adolescents (*Zentrum für die gesunde Entwicklung von Kindern und Jugendlichen*).

Figure 2.1. Trend in expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education in the German-speaking Community, 2016-2020

In EUR million



Note: Includes central and local expenditure; Staff salaries include salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff employed in pre-primary to upper secondary education and centrally deployed personnel; Other spending includes funding for pedagogical projects, student transportation, the development and revision of core curricula and funding for *Kaleido*; Expenditure is not adjusted for inflation.
Source: Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the overall expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education has increased from EUR 109.9 million in 2016 to EUR 113.7 million in 2020, with a brief decrease from 2017 to 2018 on account of the significant infrastructural investments in the preceding years. The number of pre-primary to upper secondary students has remained relatively constant during this period, decreasing only slightly from 12 281 to 12 159 (MDG, 2022[5]). The budget increase over this time period was primarily driven by staff expenditure, while other current expenditure remained relatively constant.[7] Another, less significant, driver of expenditure during this period was the funding for *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, which rose from EUR 3.5 million to EUR 4.9 million and grew from 65 to 87 employees between 2017 and 2021[8] (see also Table 2.1). A similar development can be observed across OECD countries (Wolff, Baumol and Saini, 2014[11]; OECD, 2017, p. 34[12]). Even adjusted for inflation, total current expenditure per student in public institutions (ISCED 1-4) has increased by 1.7% per year between 2012 and 2018 on average across the

OECD. In the Flemish and French Communities, the inflation-adjusted rise in current expenditure per student was less pronounced, at 0.3% per year, and – as in the German-speaking Community – mostly driven by rising staff expenditure (OECD, 2021, pp. 309, Table C6.5[10]).

Table 2.1. Expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education in the German-speaking Community, 2016-2020

In EUR thousand (percentage of total spending in parentheses)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Central expenditure (Community)					
Salaries pre-primary education	8 112 (7.4%)	8 301 (7.6%)	8 684 (8.1%)	9 603 (8.6%)	10 295 (9.1%)
Salaries primary education	19 596 (17.8%)	20 562 (18.8%)	21 482 (20.0%)	22 781 (20.5%)	23 494 (20.7%)
Salaries secondary education	36 752 (33.4%)	37 759 (34.5%)	38 561 (36.0%)	39 547 (35.5%)	40 214 (35.4%)
Salaries extra staff (all levels)	1 609 (1.5%)	1 739 (1.6%)	1 672 (1.6%)	1 606 (1.4%)	1 614 (1.4%)
Operating grants (pre-primary to secondary)	5 547 (5.0%)	5 559 (5.1%)	5 610 (5.2%)	5 597 (5.0%)	5 520 (4.9%)
Salaries SEN schools (all levels)	9 447 (8.6%)	10 048 (9.2%)	10 887 (10.1%)	11 486 (10.3%)	11 938 (10.5%)
Operating grants SEN schools (all levels)	419 (0.4%)	416 (0.4%)	435 (0.4%)	467 (0.4%)	422 (0.4%)
Salaries and operating grant Kaleido	3 490 (3.2%)	3 971 (3.6%)	4 271 (4.0%)	4 454 (4.0%)	4 890 (4.3%)
School transportation	1 268 (1.2%)	1 199 (1.1%)	1 214 (1.1%)	1 344 (1.2%)	1 396 (1.2%)
Pedagogical projects	259 (0.2%)	282 (0.3%)	409 (0.4%)	452 (0.4%)	207 (0.2%)
Supplementary funding for equipment and material	830 (0.8%)	577 (0.5%)	451 (0.4%)	623 (0.6%)	616 (0.5%)
Infrastructure	3 241 (2.9%)	6 484 (5.9%)	706 (0.7%)	1 234 (1.1%)	2 108 (1.9%)
Local expenditure (Municipalities)					
Salaries (all levels and staff types)	3 186 (2.9%)	3 265 (3.0%)	3 559 (3.3%)	3 578 (3.2%)	3 083 (2.7%)
Operating costs	3 306 (3.0%)	3 372 (3.1%)	3 608 (3.4%)	3 718 (3.3%)	2 894 (2.5%)
Infrastructure and material	9 574 (8.7%)	2 549 (2.3%)	2 293 (2.1%)	1 269 (1.1%)	1 288 (1.1%)
Other costs	1 044 (0.9%)	1 062 (1.0%)	999 (0.9%)	1 090 (1.0%)	1 070 (0.9%)
Total expenditure (pre-primary to upper secondary)	**109 956**	**109 478**	**107 263**	**111 375**	**113 701**

Notes: Adult education, higher education and funding for study scholarships are not included; Expenditure on part-time arts education in the music academy and curriculum development are not shown in the table but included in the total; Spending not adjusted for inflation; Data for the central level refer to actual expenditure, data for the local level refer to budgeted expenditure.
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Education expenditure in international comparison

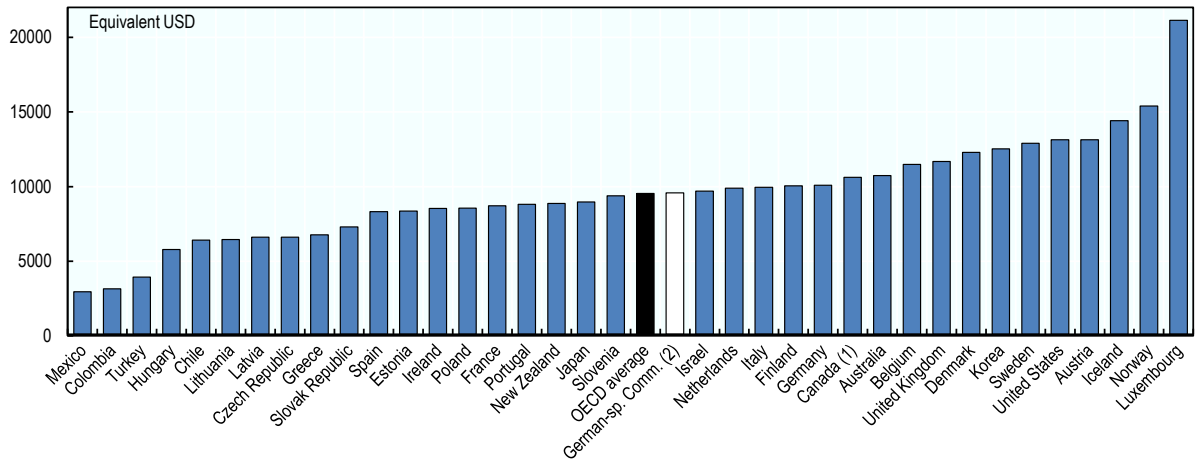
The German-speaking Community's lack of inclusion in the joint UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) data collection makes it difficult to provide an internationally comparable picture of its spending on school education. Comparisons based on the Community's national expenditure data need to be treated with caution due to differences in reporting standards. Nevertheless, available data suggest that per-student expenditure was close to the OECD average in primary education and about 15% above the OECD average in secondary education in 2018 (see Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.3).

At the national level (not including the German-speaking Community), expenditure on school education in Belgium is high by international standards. In 2018, expenditure on primary education institutions stood at USD 11 482 (equivalent USD converted using PPPs) per student, compared to the OECD average of USD 9 550 (see Figure 2.2). At the secondary level, Belgium spent USD 14 758 per student, the sixth largest amount among OECD countries and significantly above the average of USD 11 192 (see

Figure 2.3). On average, per-student expenditure in educational institutions was only slightly higher for vocational education (USD 14 522) than for general education (USD 14 935) (OECD, 2021, pp. 241, Table C1.1[10]). The per-student total expenditure on primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education in Belgium amounted to 25.3% of GDP per capita, compared to 23.2% on average across the OECD. This was above the level of spending in the Netherlands (21.9%), Germany (23.2%) and France (24.1%), but below the level of spending in the United Kingdom (26.6%), Austria (26.7%) and Norway (27.7%) (OECD, 2021, pp. 240, Table C1.4[10]).

Figure 2.2. Total expenditure on primary institutions per full-time equivalent student, 2018

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, direct expenditure within educational institutions



1. Includes pre-primary programmes.
2. Comparability with other OECD jurisdictions is limited by methodological differences. Expenditures related to multiple levels of education (e.g. infrastructure investments) were adjusted in proportion to student enrolment at different levels; Expenditure on special needs education was assigned based on the proportion of SEN students in primary and secondary education.
Note: The data include public and private expenditures; Data for Belgium as a whole excludes the German-speaking Community; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the level of per student expenditure.
Sources: OECD (2021[10]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en, Table C1.1; Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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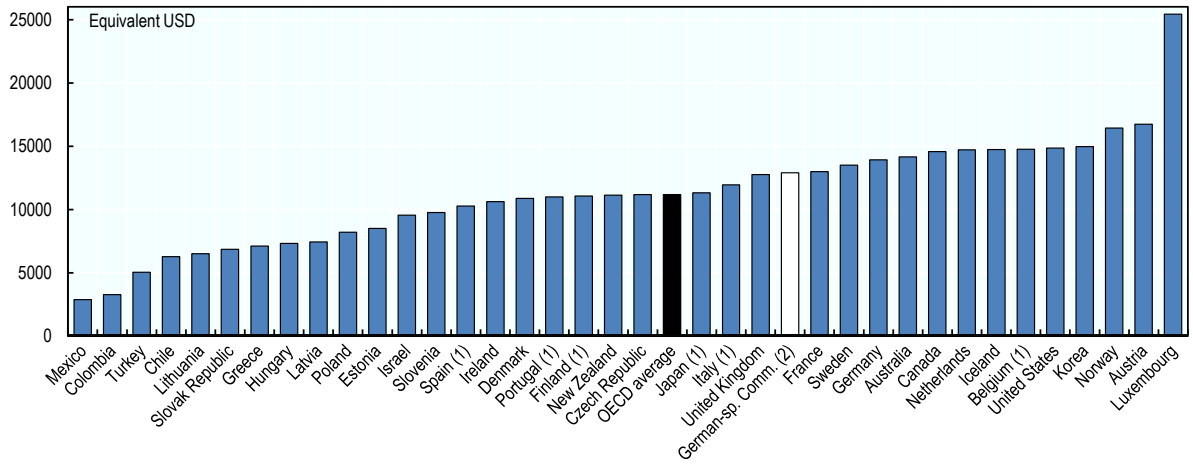
Figure 2.3. Total expenditure on secondary institutions per full-time equivalent student, 2018

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, direct expenditure within educational institutions



1. Includes post-secondary non-tertiary education.
2. Comparability with other OECD jurisdictions is limited by methodological differences. Expenditures related to multiple levels of education (e.g. infrastructure investments) were adjusted in proportion to student enrolment at different levels; Expenditure on special needs education was assigned based on the proportion of SEN students in primary and secondary education.
Note: The data include public and private expenditures; Data for Belgium as a whole excludes the German-speaking Community; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the level of per student expenditure.
Sources: OECD (2021[10]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en, Table C1.1; Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

StatLink https://stat.link/32p0ol

Although the levels of per-student spending across the three Belgian Communities are more homogeneous than, for example, across sub-national entities in the United States, Canada or Switzerland (OECD, 2021, pp. 232, Box C1.1.[10]), they are not identical. The amount of the central funding allocated to the Flemish and French Communities is linked to the evolution of the school-age population, but involves a degree of political negotiation (OECD, 2017, p. 257[12]). The German-speaking Community receives its lump sum funding through a separate mechanism. Although the allocation mechanism has been adjusted over time to mirror more closely the funding received by the other Communities (Bayenet and Veiders, 2007[13]), the German-speaking Community's accounts do not currently permit the identification of the amount of central funding intended for education, thus preventing a comparison with the allocations of the other Communities (MDG, 2022[5]). In addition, the Communities can complement their central funding with resources raised at the local level and are permitted to reallocate their central allocations for education across spending domains since they are not earmarked (OECD, 2017, p. 257[12]). Therefore, UOE expenditure data for the French and the Flemish Communities only constitute a rough approximation of expenditure in the German-speaking Community, even though they allow for more rigorous international comparisons.

Schools in Belgium are almost exclusively funded from public sources. After transfers, 98% of the expenditure on public schools (ISCED1-4) came from public sources in 2018 (97% on average across the OECD). Due to the widespread public funding of recognised private schools, they too received 95% of their expenditure from public sources, compared to just 54% across the OECD (OECD, 2021, pp. 242, Table C1.2[10]). On average across the OECD, private schools receive 38% less public resources than public schools and – in most systems – make up for this difference by raising a substantial part of their revenues from private sources, typically in the form of parental fees. On balance, the total per-student funding in

private schools exceeded that in public schools by 11% (OECD, 2021, pp. 242, Table C1.2[10]), although there are significant differences both within and between countries (Boeskens, 2016[14]).

In comparison, private schools in Belgium (again, not including the German-speaking Community) receive more public funding (only 20% less than public schools). Since publicly-funded private schools in Belgium do not have the right to charge tuition fees though, their ability to make up for this difference is more limited, resulting in an overall level of per-student funding that is 18% below the public sector. The lack of school-level expenditure data in the German-speaking Community does not allow for direct comparisons of expenditure across the three school networks. Yet, as described in the following sections, prior to the 2020/21 school year, schools of the private FSU network received less funding for some types of expenditure than schools of the GUW network and – in the absence of tuition fees and financial support from their private network provider – had limited scope to compensate for this difference.

The governance of school funding and its major components

Figure 2.4 shows the main funding flows in the German-speaking Community. The process for distributing funding to primary and secondary schools differs between schools of the Official and Free Subsidised Education Systems (OSU and FSU) and those belonging to the Community Education System (GUW) (MDG, 2022[5]). While the schools in the GUW network are fully funded by the Community,[9] schools of the OSU network can receive additional funding from their providers (the nine local municipalities), raised through local taxes. Since the municipalities are not required to inform the ministry about the funds they provide for schools, no data are available.

While schools of the GUW network are directly supervised by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research, schools of the OSU network are supervised by the school aldermen (*Schulschöffen*) of their municipal mayors. The exchange between the OSU network's schools and their aldermen are facilitated by a network co-ordinator (*Koordination OSU Netzwerk*) and schools of the FSU network are co-ordinated by the Catholic Education Secretariat (*Sekretariat des Katholischen Unterrichtswesens*). At the time of the OECD review, such a network co-ordination did not yet exist in the GUW network, which meant that the OSU and FSU networks had to seek agreements with the GUW network by contacting either individual schools or the minister as their immediate supervisor. By September 2021, a co-ordinator position for the GUW network (0.5 Full-Time Equivalent, FTE) had been created.

Compulsory schooling is free of charge in the German-speaking Community and no tuition fees may be charged until the end of compulsory schooling, including in the publicly-funded private schools of the FSU network. Pre-primary education is also free of charge for children from the age of three (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015[6]). Even though there is no data on private educational expenditure by parents in the German-speaking Community (MDG, 2022[5]), a number of regulations are in place to limit the extent of parents' contributions to non-tuition expenses. School transport has been free for students under 12 years since the school year 2008/09. For secondary school attendance, parents receive discounts on school transport or part of the costs are reimbursed (Eurydice, 2020[4]). If no adequate support can be guaranteed by the Walloon region's public transport network, the Community organises student transport. Schools at the pre-primary and primary level are prohibited from taking parental contributions for teaching materials and other items covered by the ministry's "funding to reduce school attendance costs" (see below). However, there is no central guidance on the types of costs that secondary schools can pass on to parents and evidence suggests that parental co-payments for school materials, school trips etc. at this level are higher.

Schools in the German-speaking Community receive their resources through several funding streams, which are described below:

- **Funding for teaching and non-teaching staff**: The ministry directly pays the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff in all recognised schools according to a uniform salary scale used across all three school networks. The number of full-time equivalent staff funded for each school

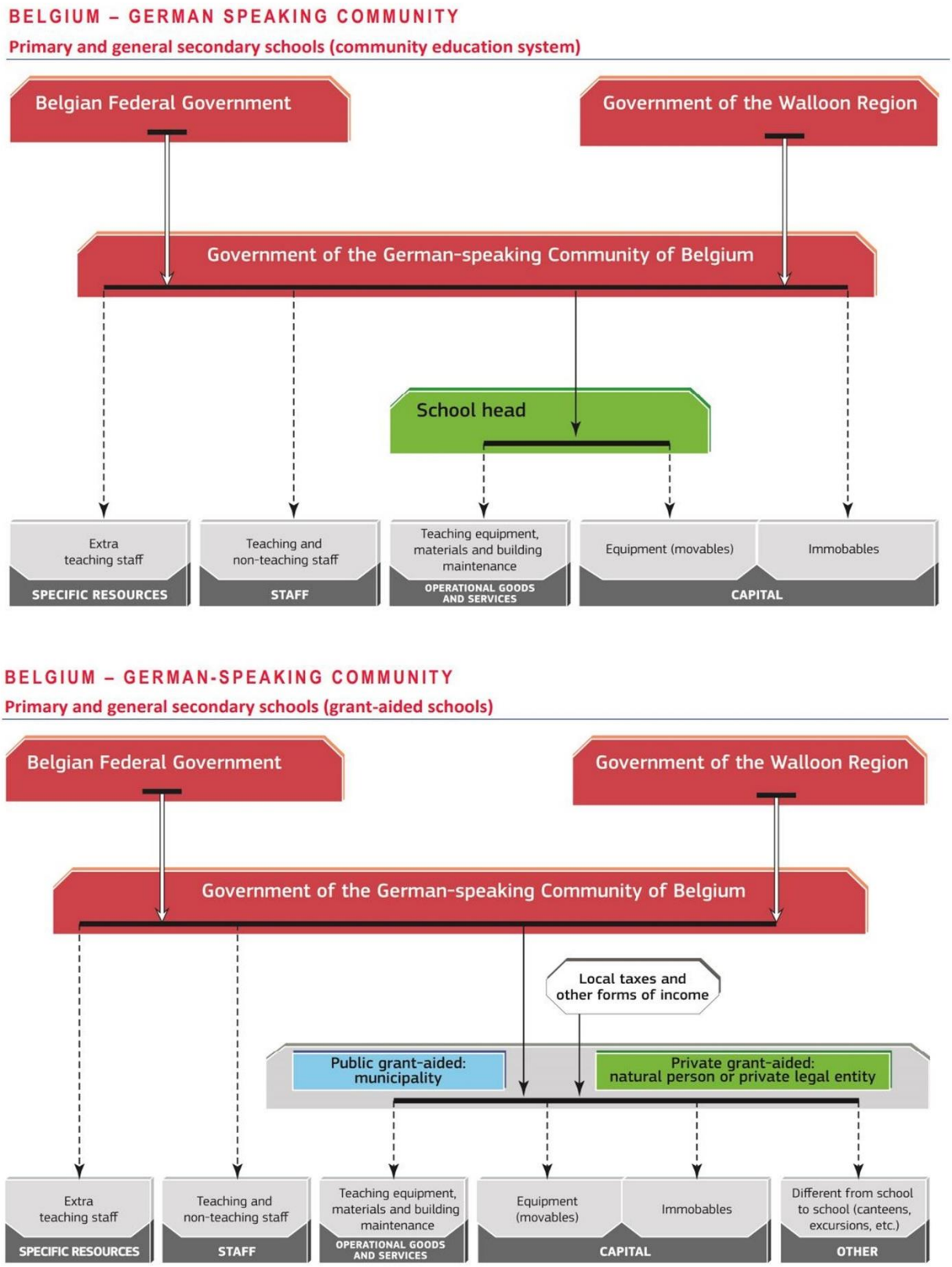
(*Stellenkapital*) is calculated based on a distribution formula (*Verteilungsschlüssel*) explained below. The government also directly funds release time for teachers to engage in non-instruction activities (special pedagogical assignments, *Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) as well as additional contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA) that are not employed directly by the schools but may be allocated based on requests.

- **Funding for operating expenditure and minor capital expenses**: The mechanism for funding operating and minor capital expenses (including rent, electricity, water, gas etc. and other goods and services for the day-to-day running of schools) differs across the three school networks:
  - Schools of the GUW network are fully funded by the ministry and receive an annual block grant, paid in 12 monthly instalments, to cover operating costs and minor capital expenses (*Funktionsdotation*). The value of the block grant is determined via annual negotiations. Schools in the GUW network prepare an annual financial plan and have a high degree of financial autonomy for the respective financial year. If, during a financial year, the funds first set out in the financial plan are not sufficient for a school, the school may receive a supplementary allocation (*Zusatzdotation*).
  - The monthly operating grant (*Funktionssubvention*) for schools of the private FSU network and of the OSU network is calculated annually based on a formula weighting the student numbers (see Box 2.1). In the case of OSU schools, the grants are allocated to municipalities in their role as school providers, which then distribute the funds to their schools and may choose to provide additional top-up funding from their own resources. The funds are earmarked, and they may not be used for non-school purposes. The ministry has the right to check the proper use of the funds. In the case of the private FSU schools, the funding is allocated directly to schools. Since the currently recognised FSU schools do not receive financial support from their Episcopal network provider, they depend exclusively on the public subsidy.
- **Funding for school infrastructure:** In the case of GUW schools, infrastructure expenditures are paid directly by the government. For schools of the OSU and FSU networks, the government covers 80% of the expenditure on infrastructure. The process for infrastructure funding is explained in more detail below. The ministry's department for infrastructure (*Fachbereich Infrastruktur*) is accompanying renovations or new constructions (Eurydice, 2020[4]). In a series of "campus projects" funded through public-private partnerships, infrastructural interventions with a focus on pedagogical synergies have led to the combination of multiple levels of education in the same school sites in order to facilitate co-operation, exchange and the transition of students across levels of education in a number of school sites, creating campuses on *Monschauer Straße*, *Lascheterweg*, and *Ervierser Straße* in Eupen.[10]
- **Additional funding for school equipment**: Additional funding is available to contribute to schools' expenses on moveable equipment, such as furniture and ICT equipment. In the case of the Community schools, the government covers 100% of these expenses. Schools of the OSU and FSU networks are only reimbursed for 60% of their costs and have to contribute the remaining 40% from their own resources (in the case of OSU schools, those of the municipalities) (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2014, p. 47 f.[9]). Schools have to submit requests for each reimbursement, which are examined and approved on a case-by-case basis by the minister.
- **Additional funding streams**: Schools of the subsidised OSU and FSU networks receive additional funding for a variety of purposes. The amounts are indexed annually. In the case of GUW schools, these expenses are intended to be covered in the main operating grant.
  - **Funding for pedagogical purposes**: The grant covers a variety of pedagogical expenses including teachers' professional learning activities, pedagogical materials, and out-of-school activities not covered by the core curricula. The amount of the grant is calculated on a per-student basis (in 2020/21: EUR 8.30 for each student in pre-primary and primary education, EUR 16.61 in secondary education and EUR 38.75 in Special Education Needs [SEN] schools)

and, in the case of OSU schools, channelled through the municipalities. School leaders are free to decide which proportion of the grant for pedagogical purposes to devote to teachers' professional development.

- **Funding to reduce school attendance costs in pre-primary and primary education**: In pre-primary and primary education, these funds were introduced to absolve parents from contributing to the following: One-day cultural or sporting activities that take place during school hours in the school, swimming lessons and transport to the swimming pool, functional costs of the school, and costs for the diploma exhibition. The amount of the grant is calculated on a per-student basis (in 2020/21: EUR 27.33 for each student in pre-primary education and EUR 109.32 for each student in primary education). For activities taking place during school hours and materials not listed, the school may ask parents to contribute the cost price. No equivalent funding is distributed at the secondary level.
- **Funding for lunch break supervision**: OSU and FSU schools are entitled to be reimbursed for one lunch break supervision for each 75 students enrolled in the school (or 40 students in SEN schools). The amount of funding varies based on the qualifications of the supervising person). The costs are only reimbursed retrospectively after the end of the school year based on an application for reimbursement.
- **Funding for digital infrastructure:** The programmes "Internet Connection for All Schools" and "Internet connection for all classrooms" in the Community are currently pushing the expansion of the Internet-access for all schools. The bandwidth of the Internet connection is calculated according to the number of students. Currently, secondary schools and technical schools are being connected to the fibre optic network (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021, pp. 8, 82[2]). All schools in the different school networks benefit from these programmes.

Figure 2.4. Funding flows in the German-speaking Community's school system



Source: European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice (2014[9]), *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*, pp. 47-48.

Box 2.1. Calculation of the operating grant in FSU and OSU schools, Sept. 2020

The monthly operating grant (*Funktionssubvention*) for schools of the private grant-aided FSU network and the public grant-aided OSU network is calculated annually based on the number of enrolled students and different weights. All values are tied to a basic index and a consumer price index, which is regularly adjusted. As of September 2020, the combined index was 1.4013 and students were assigned the following values for the calculation of the operating grant:

Pre-primary education: EUR 255 per student.

Primary education: EUR 343 per student.

Secondary education: depending on students' grade, programme type and subject.

- EUR 744 per **student in category A:** students in general secondary education and all students in the second and third stages of technical education in the following fields of study: commerce/commercial technology, economics, secretarial/administrative/computer science, languages/tourism, and sports).
- EUR 851 per **student in category B**: students in the first year of the assimilation stream and the second year of vocational education, students in the second and third stages of technical and vocational secondary education in the following fields of study: agriculture, social sciences, social services, home economics and nutrition, environmental studies, natural sciences, beauty care, clothing, nursing, and all forms of education or fields of study not mentioned in categories A, C and D.
- EUR 971 per **student in category C**: students in the second and third stages of secondary technical education in the following fields of study: electromechanics, electrical engineering, mechanics, woodworking (construction-furniture), electronics, architectural drawing and public works (second level); students in the second and third stages of secondary vocational education in the following fields of study: wood processing (construction-furniture), iron processing, machining mechanics, electrical engineering, motor vehicle mechanics, electronics, electrical engineering, electromechanics, shell construction.
- EUR 1 033 per **student in category D**: students in second and third stages of secondary technical education in the following fields of study: industrial electronics (third level only), automation, pneumatics, mechanics, construction drawing and public works (third level only); students in the second and third stages of secondary vocational education in the following fields of study: Automation, pneumatics, mechanics (CNC) (third stage only).
- EUR 5 605 lump sum for the digital resource library.
- EUR 77 076 lump sum to cover equipment for schools offering exclusively technical and vocational education.

Part-time vocational education: EUR 426 per student.

SEN schools: EUR 590 per student up to 13 years, EUR 605 per student over 13 years.[11]

Boarding schools of the FSU network: In addition to a EUR 27 697 lump sum, schools may receive the following subsidies for up to 126 boarders (EUR 834 per student in primary and SEN schools, EUR 692 per student in secondary school).

A decree passed in June 2021 raised the monthly operating grant for students in secondary education (categories A-D) and students in part-time vocational education in FSU schools by 15%, starting in

September 2021 (PDG, 2021[15]). In addition, as of September 2021, the combined index had been increased from 1.4013 to 1.4414.

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (MDG) (2022[5]), *OECD Education Policy Reviews - Background Report of the German-speaking Community of Belgium*.

Distribution and use of staff hours

Each school is granted a certain number of funded staff positions or hours, based on their student numbers and a complex set of quotas (see Box 2.2). The school providers are responsible for recruiting and selecting pedagogical staff to fill the positions allocated through the distribution formula before the start of the school year. Between October and January of each school year, the ministry verifies whether the allocated staff positions require adjustments based on the final numbers of enrolled students in that school year (MDG, 2022[5]). In both primary and secondary education, school leaders are autonomous in their organisation of learning groups and the use their staff hours.

Box 2.2. Calculation of staff positions/hours in the German-speaking Community

Mainstream schools in the German-speaking Community are allocated a given number of staff positions (in primary education) or staff hours (in secondary education) based on their enrolment.

Pre-primary and primary education

The number of teaching staff positions in pre-primary and primary education is calculated preliminarily based on the number of students enrolled on 15 March of the preceding school year and re-calculated at the end of September. Due to rising enrolments over the course of the school year, staff positions in pre-primary education are re-calculated once more in April:

- Pre-primary centres receive 1 FTE **pre-primary teacher** position for up to 19 children, 1.5 FTE for 20-25 children, 2 FTE for 26-32 children, 2.25 FTE for 33-39 children and an additional 0.25 FTE for each five or six children above. In addition, since 2019/20, providers have been eligible for a number of **pre-primary assistant** positions. The resources for pre-primary assistants will be gradually increased until providers receive 0.5 FTE positions for each set of up to 25 children in their network by 2024/25 (when the entry age to kindergarten will be lowered from three to two and a half years).
- Primary schools receive 1.25 FTE **primary teacher** positions for up to 15 students, 1.5 FTE for 16-20 students, 2 FTE for 21-25 students and an additional 0.25 FTE for each additional five students above.

Each primary school (and connected pre-primary centre) receives funding for anything between a 0.25 FTE **school leader** position (50-99 students) to 1 FTE for schools with more than 180 students or at least 125 students spread across three school sites. In addition, school providers receive a quarter **head secretary** position for each 100 primary students in their school network. Other quotas apply for religion and philosophy teachers as well as additional roles, including accountants and staff for pedagogical projects (usually based on a system of quarter positions). Providers can redistribute the allocated staff positions across schools within their network.

Secondary education

The funded hours for teaching staff in secondary education is calculated based on student enrolment at the end of January in the preceding school year and re-calculated at the end of September in case

student numbers rose by more than 7.5%. The staff hours are not allocated on a simple per-capita basis but using a complex set of quotas. For each level of education (first, second or third stage) and type of education (general, technical or vocational), the number of students is associated with a given number of staff hours. In technical and vocational education, the formula further distinguishes between subjects with a higher and those with a lower number of associated teacher hours. For example:

- In the **A-stream of the first stage of secondary education**, each started group of 12 students is assigned 20 teacher hours. In addition, the first 40 students are assigned 1.4 teacher hours each and every student above that, 0.7 teacher hours. In the B-stream, more teacher hours are assigned.
- In the **second and third stages of general secondary education**, the first 40 students are assigned 3.2 teacher hours each and any student above that is assigned 1.4 teacher hours.
- In the **third stage of vocational education**, for lower-coefficient subjects, the first 20 students are assigned 3.2 teacher hours each and any student above that, 1.4 teacher hours. For subjects with higher coefficients, the values are 4.1 and 3.3 respectively.

In addition to the teaching staff, secondary schools can receive funding for a range of additional administrative and leadership staff (see Chapter 4).

Sources: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (MDG) (2022[5]), *OECD Education Policy Reviews - Background Report of the German-speaking Community of Belgium*; Government of the German-speaking Community (1997) *Programmdekret 1997 vom 20. Mai 1997*, Article 3 §2; Government of the German-speaking Community (2009[16]), *Dekret über das Regelgrundschulwesen (26. April 1999) [Decree on mainstream primary education]*.

Schools or school providers have several options to request resources for additional staff. For example, schools can submit requests for additional contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA) or special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) to support school projects (e.g. *Ecole numérique* or the *Heterogenitätsprojekt*) or support individual students with SEN or gifted students.[12] The requests are evaluated and approved by the minister. Schools can also hire additional staff using their own resources. Although the employment of additional staff in schools is not monitored, it is understood to be practiced only in few cases (MDG, 2022[5]).

Over the past few years, schools have been provided with additional personnel resources through the creation of new staff positions. Since 2009, secondary schools with a recognised digital resource centre receive funding for a full-time resource librarian position (*Lehrer-Mediothekar*). In 2018, the position of head secretary (*Chefsekretär/in*) was created to support school leaders in primary schools with their increasing administrative workload. Starting with the school year 2021/22, each secondary school can receive resources for a full-time ICT co-ordinator (*IT-Beauftragte/r*) (see Chapter 4).

Funding for school infrastructure and material resources

The German-speaking Community provides targeted subsidies to support constructions and renovations of school buildings. The Community covers 100% of the cost for constructions and renovations in schools of its own network (GUW) and 80% of the cost for other schools (MDG, 2022[5]). Infrastructural plans suggest that a total of EUR 140 million were invested in the construction of school infrastructure from 2009 to 2020, of which the Community contributed EUR 130 million.

Reports from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 suggest that school principals in the German-speaking Community were largely satisfied with both the quality and quantity of educational materials at their disposal. At least 95% of 15-year-old students attended schools whose principals reported that their capacity to provide instruction was hindered not at all or very little by inadequate or a

lack of educational materials (incl. textbooks, ICT equipment, library or laboratory material), compared to only two thirds on average across the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4[17]).

By contrast, around a third of 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal reported that instruction was hindered more than a little by inadequate or poor quality physical infrastructure (incl. building, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems) (30% vs. 35% across the OECD) or by a shortages of physical infrastructure (35% vs. 37% across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4[17]).

Governing the opening and closure of publicly-funded schools

The German-speaking Community's primary education system is characterised by a relatively large number of small schools, mostly run by the municipal OSU network. In the school year 2020/21, 26 of the 55 primary schools had fewer than 50 students with one counting as few as eight students (MDG, 2022[5]). In small primary schools, especially in the more rural areas, students from different years are sometimes taught together. Small schools experience higher fixed costs and maintaining a fragmented school network with a large number of small sites can pose challenges for the provision of a high-quality education with limited resources (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019[18]; Ares Abalde, 2014[19]). At the same time, the role of schools for their local communities and their proximity to students' homes is considered an important feature of the Community's education system and the regulations governing the opening and closure of schools are designed to maintain small schools.

The initial and continued funding of schools at the pre-primary and primary level is conditional on the size of their student body. To first obtain public subsidies, newly founded primary schools need to have at least 75 students (counting only those that attend the closest school to their residence) and maintain this number over the first four years of their existence. Pre-primary schools need to have at least 25 students. Once established, schools can lose their public subsidy if their student numbers fall below 12 (for primary schools) or six (for pre-primary schools) in two consecutive years. If schools manage to reach the minimum number of students (12 or six) again within a space of three years, they can become eligible for public subsidies again (or reopen, in case they had closed).

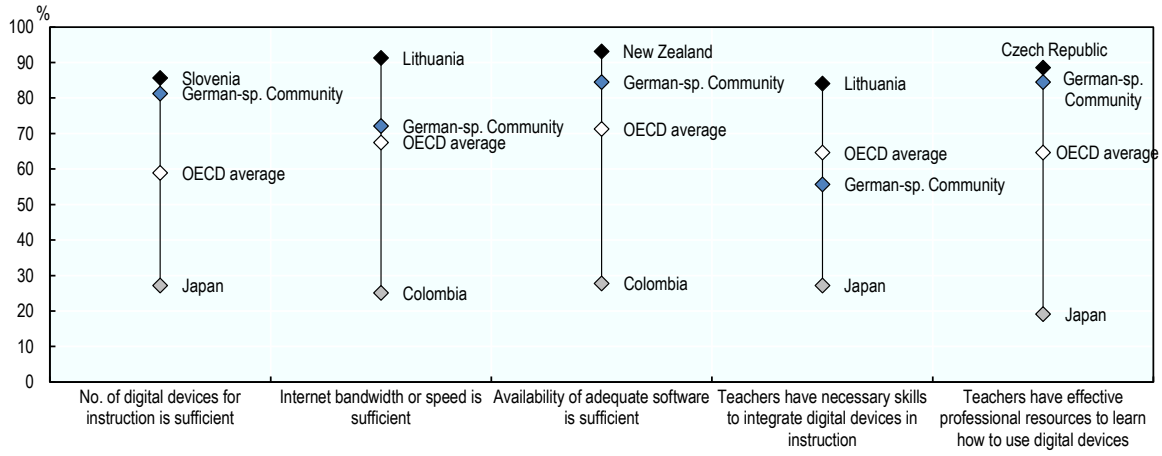
Digitalisation and ICT infrastructure

The ministry has been working to reform the digital infrastructure in schools for some years, focusing on improving Internet connectivity in schools and hiring additional personnel to manage ICT resources in schools. In 2018, the needs and usage of ICT resources in schools and by teachers of the German-speaking Community were surveyed as part of the „*Baromètre Digital Wallonia*" study conducted in the Wallonia and Brussels regions (Agence du Numérique, 2018[20]). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry draw on these results and accelerated its efforts to extend Internet connectivity in schools, prioritising the provision of laptops to teachers and secondary school students (MDG, 2022[5]). Since the first lockdown in 2020, efforts were made to provide all families that lacked the resources to permit their children to follow distance learning with laptops on a means-tested basis.

Yet, access to ICT resources alone is not sufficient to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Although the quality of ICT resources in schools has rarely been systematically measured, they are unlikely to support student learning if computers are old, educational software inadequate or the Internet connection is slow (Bulman and Fairlie, 2016[21]). As can be seen in Figure 2.5, on the whole, secondary school leaders in the German-speaking Community report above-average satisfaction with the adequacy of digital technologies available for learning and teaching in their schools.

Figure 2.5. School capacity to enhance teaching and learning using digital devices, 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principal agreed or strongly agreed with the following about their school



Source: OECD (2020[17]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.5.15 and V.B1.5.15.

StatLink https://stat.link/tnl94h

An equally important condition for the successful use of ICT resources is teachers' preparedness to integrate them effectively into their instruction. In 2018, only little more than half of 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community (55.7%) attended a school whose leader considered that teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction, compared to 64.6, on average across the OECD. At the same time, school leaders were satisfied with the availability of professional resources that could help teachers learn how to use digital devices (see Figure 2.5).

Every municipality and secondary school in the German-speaking Community has a staff member responsible for ICT support and, by September 2021, every secondary school should have a full-time ICT staff member. The ministry plans to provide additional continuing professional development classes, webinars and online learning videos to teachers on subjects such as the use of office software, based on the requests of schools. The *Ecole Numérique* project, run by the Walloon region, provides additional resources in the area of ICT-based learning and supported 32 initiatives in the German-speaking Community with ICT hardware and network equipment in 2019/20 (MDG, 2022[5]).

System-level monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools

The German-speaking Community has a number of processes in place through which it collects data on educational quality, including regular external school evaluations and standardised student assessments. As described in Chapter 1, the Community does not conduct central examinations at any level of education (i.e. standardised assessments with formal consequence for students or affecting students' grades or certification). Nevertheless, schools of all education networks regularly participate in large-scale student assessment. This includes the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15-year-olds' performance in reading, mathematics and science, a test for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF) to assess students' competency in French as a foreign language, and comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8). The VERA tests are not used for international comparisons, meaning that there is no international comparative evidence on school performance at the primary level. The Community's participation in both PISA and the VERA tests is

co-ordinated by the AHS (the latter in co-operation with the University of Koblenz-Landau) (AHS, Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, undated[22]).[13]

The Community's process of regular internal and external school evaluations, which has been developed over the past two decades, is another important source of information on educational quality in the Community. Schools are required to carry out an internal school evaluation at least once every three years. The process is overseen by the external evaluation and managed by the school leader or pedagogical council. Since 2009, the internal evaluation is complemented by an external evaluation carried out every five years by the respective unit within the AHS. A number of additional actors and services contribute to the evaluation process and support schools in following up on its results, including the school inspectorate, the school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*), pedagogical advisory service (*Fachberatung*), the ZFP's competency centre (*Kompetenzzentrum des Zentrums für Förderpädagogik, ZFP*) and Kaleido (see Chapter 3). The school evaluation process and the role of support services is described in more detail in Chapters 1 and 4.

Information on the quality of education is disseminated through different channels in the German-speaking Community. The system-wide results of VERA, PISA and DELF are published in reports. School-level results are not made public, but they are shared with school leaders and teachers (Grünkorn, Klieme and Stanat, 2019[23]) (although it should be noted that PISA results are only representative at the level of the Community, not the school). Likewise, the external evaluation publishes system-level reports on their evaluation results in irregular intervals. Following a first report in 2010, a second report covering the period 2010-13 was presented in 2014 (Breuer, Müllender and Schieren, 2014[24]). The reporting lapsed during the period 2014-15 and resumed in 2021 with a report covering the period 2016-20 (Cormann and Goor, 2021[25]). Individual schools' evaluation reports are not made public. Kaleido and the AHS also publish regular reports describing their activities.

Transitions across levels of education, between pathways and into the labour market

Transitions across years and levels of education

Although precise data on enrolment in early childhood education and care in the German-speaking Community is not available, the ministry estimates enrolment at age 3 to be around 96% (see Chapter 1). Every pre-primary school in the German-speaking Community is institutionally linked to a primary school and led by a shared school leader. In addition, many are located in close physical proximity to their primary schools, e.g. as part of a campus structure. This facilitates the collaboration between staff across levels of education and helps to ease children's transition from kindergarten to primary school (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 45[26]). Staff of both levels meet at the end of the school year to discuss students' transition to primary school and evaluate whether or not students display the requisite competencies to advance to the first year of primary education. Teachers, or the class council, which is comprised of the school leadership and all other personnel responsible for a given student, provide a recommendation, but the decisions to enrol their children in primary education is left to parents. Primary school staff may also suggest for Kaleido to conduct a school readiness test if parents agree. The testing of school readiness includes observations of the child in the kindergarten, the performance of a school readiness test and, if necessary, further specialised examinations (MDG, 2022[5]).

In primary and secondary education, students' progression to the next grade is decided by the class council. In primary education, grade repetition cases are discussed with parents, but there are no means to appeal the class council's decision. In secondary education, the class council can decide to let students re-sit exams (*Nachprüfungen*) in the subjects they failed before the start of the next school year. The class council can then decide to let students advance to the next year, to repeat a year, or to be conditionally promoted but repeat certain subjects (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of assessment practices). The

decision of the class council can be appealed at the board of appeal, which consists of several members of the ministry and one representative of the school provider.

The rate of grade repetition in the German-speaking Community, particularly in some schools, remains high. PISA 2018 data suggests that, among 15-year-old students, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school (OECD, 2020, pp. 308, Table V.B2.2.9[17]). This was below the share reported by the French Community (41.1%) but significantly above that of the Flemish Community (23.2%) and the OECD average of 11.4%. In 2018, 13.0% of 15-year-olds reported to have repeated at least one grade in primary education and 12.6% to have repeated at least once in lower secondary education (compared to just 6.7% and 5.5% respectively across the OECD). As in many other school systems, the probability of repeating a grade in the German-speaking Community is associated with students' socio-economic status, which raises concerns for equity (De Witte et al., 2018, p. 17[27]).

The German-speaking Community does not collect annual data on the number of students who repeated a year or the overall share of students who have, at some point, repeated a year. Ad hoc analyses conducted by the ministry suggest that, in 2020/21, 14.6% of students in primary education were enrolled in a grade that was one year below that typical for their age (*Schulrückstand*) and 1.4% were enrolled two or more years below the expected grade level. In secondary education, 20.4% of students were enrolled one year below the expected grade level and 9.4% two or more years.[14] However, it should be noted that a number of factors besides grade repetition can cause such discrepancies, including a deferred entry into primary school. Therefore, they do not allow direct inferences about the prevalence of grade repetition.

Tracking and transitions between educational pathways

As described in Chapter 1, schooling in the German-speaking Community is comprehensive during the six years of primary education. At the start of secondary education (typically at age 12), students are tracked into an A-stream and a B-stream.[15] In 2020/21, 8% of students in the first year of secondary education attended the B-stream, which is primarily intended for students who failed to obtain a certificate for the successful completion of primary education and provides them with additional support to obtain their primary school certificate before pursuing further technical or vocationally-oriented pathways. Students can switch from the B-stream to the A-stream on recommendation of the class council (and, in case students have not successfully completed their primary school certificate, a positive evaluation from the admissions council and Kaleido) (MDG, 2022[5]). However, the Community does not collect data on the number of students who switch from the B-stream to the A-stream after their first year or on students' choices between different pathways after completing the A-stream or B-stream.

Following the first stage of secondary education (i.e. at the start of year 9), students can choose between three pathways offering school-based instruction (general, technical and vocational) and different specialisations (see Chapter 1). Switching between educational pathways remains possible throughout students' secondary education but, in some cases, requires students to repeat a year. To enter year 9 of the general track, for example, students who completed the B-stream need to first complete year 9 of vocational education. After completing the second stage of secondary education, students can switch from the vocational track to the technical or general tracks, although this is less common, requires a positive evaluation from the admissions council and requires vocational students to have completed two years in the second stage of secondary education (rather than one in the technical and general pathways). All three pathways permit students to go on to pursue higher education, although obtaining the certificate qualifying students for entry into tertiary education takes one year longer to obtain in the vocational track (13 years) than via the technical and general tracks (see Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1).

Students between the ages of 15 and 18 who no longer attend secondary school or complete an apprenticeship can enrol in part-time vocational education (*Teilzeitunterricht*), which combines three days a week of work-based learning with two days of school-based education at one of the two secondary schools specialising in technical and vocational pathways (the Robert Schuman Institute Eupen or the St.

Vith Technical Institute). The offer is primarily aimed at students at risk of dropping out and serves as a transitional solution to give students a new orientation and to enable them to integrate into vocational training or return to full-time school education. At the end of the first year of part-time vocational education, students can obtain a certificate of completion of primary education (in case they had not yet obtained it), or – depending on their success – a certificate that permits them to start an apprenticeship or transition to vocational secondary education. For students with learning difficulties or who are at risk of dropping out, the Community offers other several measures and career guidance which are described later in this chapter.

Transitions into the labour market, vocational education and career guidance

The German-speaking Community has a well-established but comparatively small Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. While 52% of students in the third stage of mainstream secondary education were enrolled in general programmes in 2020 (compared to 58% across OECD countries in 2018), most of the remaining students were enrolled in technical pathways (41%). Only 7% of students were enrolled in the vocational pathway, which is significantly less than in the neighbouring Flemish Community (OECD, 2020, pp. 258, Table B7.1[28]; Nusche et al., 2015[29]).

The structure of vocational education and training in the German-speaking Community is similar to that of dual education systems like Germany, Austria or Switzerland (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2013[30]) and the willingness of local companies to offer opportunities for work-based training is high. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of new training contracts signed in 2020 (243) has not decreased compared to previous years and unemployment among under 25-year-olds stood at 8.1% in December 2019, significantly below the national rate of 19% (Arbeitsamt der DG, 2020[31]; IAWM, 2021[32]).

A key actor in the German-speaking Community's vocational education is the Institute for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, IAWM). Funded primarily by the Community, the IAWM assumes a co-ordinating, steering and monitoring role in its system for dual training and apprenticeships and is responsible for ensuring the quality of work-based learning. In addition, the IAWM organises opportunities for students to visit local employers offering apprenticeships in spring of each year (*Schnupperwochen*). The IAWM also funds and oversees the Centre for Training and Continuing Education (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, ZAWM), which organises the training of apprentices, master craftsmen's courses and further training courses offered by SMEs (ZAWM, 2014[33]). The ZAWM's two sites Eupen and St. Vith were brought under a common management in 2021 to create synergies (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 88[26]).

Furthermore, since 2018, the IAWM offers a one-year pre-vocational programme ("*Anlehre*") aimed at young people who have failed to qualify for vocational training, dropped out of an apprenticeship or who are enrolled in part-time vocational education and wish to prepare themselves to start an apprenticeship. The programme is run through the ZAWM as part of the European Social Fund-supported project "vocational integration through training guidance in dual education" (BIDA).[16] Similar programmes exist, for example, in Switzerland and Austria (Ebner, Graf and Nikolai, 2013[34]; Ebner, 2013[35]).

Besides the IAWM, a number of actors and institutions in the German-speaking Community provide career guidance to students. This includes the employment agency, which focuses on students' career guidance from the end of compulsory education, as well as Kaleido, which organises events in schools as well as individual guidance appointments that also cover students' choice of educational pathways and study subjects at the start of secondary education (Kaleido Ostbelgien, 2021[36]). Two youth information centres ("*Jugendbüro*") in Eupen and St. Vith also offer free and confidential guidance to young adults on a range of issues including study and career choices.

Since 2018/19, the "*Wirtschaft macht Schule*" project offers learning materials for teachers and organises events in primary and secondary schools on entrepreneurialism and the local economy. The programmes

is jointly run by the Community's business development agency (*Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft Ostbelgiens*, WFG), the government, the chamber of commerce and industry and the "Study Group School and Economy" (*Studienkreis Schule & Wirtschaft*). The "Study Group School and Economy" (*Studienkreis Schule & Wirtschaft*) brings together education institutions, businesses, representatives of the ministry, private and public agencies in an effort to facilitate the co-ordination of initiatives and activities related to career guidance and work experience in the Community. In 2011, the Community has also released a core curriculum on career guidance, which was developed in co-operation with many of the stakeholders mentioned above and provides primary and secondary teachers of all subjects with guidance on how to integrate career guidance into their lessons (MDG, 2011[37]).

Strengths

The development of an overall vision has the potential to set clear goals for the education system and strengthen the coherence of future reforms and school improvement efforts

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*) to guide reforms until 2030 and beyond in order to improve educational quality and equity. The development of the vision will be informed by a bottom-up diagnosis of the system's challenges based on stakeholder perspectives, which was carried out by VDI Technologiezentrum and completed in early 2020 (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]), as well as the OECD's education policy review, which provides a complementary analyses and recommendations from an international perspective. Based on the overall vision, the government intends to develop a Master Plan in 2023, laying out an implementation strategy for the reforms needed to achieve the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*, accompanied by indicators to measure progress towards them.

Particularly in light of the German-speaking Community's decentralised system, with three school networks and 11 school providers, reaching a consensus on core values of the system and establishing clear goals for its improvement is key to guiding policy improvements. The development of the overall vision could allow the government to formulate such goals, strengthen coherence across different reform areas and create synergies between them (such as the revision and implementation of the core curricula, school leadership and teaching, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation). The vision could also help to align initiatives developed at the central level with bottom-up planning and school improvement efforts at the local level. Furthermore, an overall vision could help to sustain the focus on long-term objectives and help in sequencing and prioritising the significant number of reform processes that have been planned or initiated in relative independence of each other over recent years, including the revision of the core curricula and the teacher service code, which had begun as part of the "good personnel for good schools" (*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen*, GPGS) initiative in 2015 (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[38]).

During its stakeholder interviews, the OECD review team witnessed a widespread recognition of the need for further reforms and an impressive range of actors within and outside the school system who are engaging in debates and are invested in improving education in the German-speaking Community. This was reflected by the broad stakeholder engagement and discussions around the first diagnostic report (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]). This high level of engagement can provide a good basis to keep stakeholders closely involved throughout the development of the overall vision for the education system. This will be important to build ownership of the vision and the reforms derived from its implementation among teachers, leaders and other stakeholders. The development of an overall vision is also an opportunity to create a clear narrative about the goals that different reforms are aiming to accomplish, which can facilitate the communication of proposed changes and reduce the risk of reform fatigue.

The investment in education supports favourable learning conditions

The German-speaking Community's school system is underpinned by a sustained and, at the secondary level, above-average level of educational investment, which allows for favourable learning conditions, including comparatively small class sizes and student-teacher ratios (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4). Most schools in the German-speaking Community are well equipped concerning school buildings and pedagogical materials and the ministry has undertaken efforts to further strengthen the ICT infrastructure in schools going forward. Secondary school leaders in the German-speaking Community report above-average satisfaction with the adequacy of digital technologies available for learning and teaching in schools.

Principals' responses to the PISA 2018 survey indicate that secondary schools in the German-speaking Community were well-equipped with computers for students (providing 9 per 10 students, compared to eight on average across the OECD), although they had fewer computers with Internet connectivity available for teachers (3 per ten teachers, compared to ten on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Tables V.B2.5.7/10[17]). Only 5% of 15-year-old students attended schools whose principals reported that their capacity to provide instruction was hindered by inadequate or a lack of educational materials, such as textbooks, ICT equipment, library or laboratory material (compared to a third of 15-year-olds on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4[17]). This is notable since principals' reports of inadequate or poor quality educational materials are negatively associated with their students' reading performance in PISA 2018, even after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile (OECD, 2020, pp. 115, Table V.B1.5.3[17]).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the ministry has provided students in need with laptops.[17] It also accelerated its efforts to expand Internet connectivity in schools and strengthen capacity by hiring additional personnel to manage ICT resources. Every municipality and secondary school in the German-speaking Community has a staff member responsible for ICT support and, by September 2021, every secondary school should have a full-time ICT staff member. Although teachers will need to be supported to use these resources effectively, there are generally favourable conditions for using digital resources to enhance teaching.

The school funding system supports parental choice

Free school choice is a core value of the German-speaking Community's school system and the school funding system supports this by ensuring that parents do not have to pay tuition fees regardless of which publicly recognised school (and school network) they choose. Combined with the level of resources invested in the school system, this provide a strong basis to further strengthen its performance. Yet, as previous OECD analyses have demonstrated, beyond a certain level of investment, translating additional resources into better educational outcomes critically depends on their effective use (OECD, 2017, p. 32[12]). To help the German-speaking Community accomplish its goals, resources will need to be directed to effective interventions and to the schools and learners that need them the most, underpinned by high-quality data to allow for the continuous evaluation of the system's inputs and outputs. Potential areas of efficiency gains and examples of effective interventions will be pointed to below and in the remainder of the report.

School autonomy has the potential to facilitate innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches

Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a high degree of autonomy. School providers are free to decide on the pedagogical methods used in their schools, as well as their choice of student assessment practices. Each school also has wide-ranging autonomy in their implementation of the core curricula, the use of their staff, as well as the organisation of instruction,

including the course offer and class sizes. Combined with free school choice, this autonomy has the potential to incentivise local innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches in the Community. The structure of the Community's school network and its strong geographical coverage, particularly at the primary level, also creates the potential for a high responsiveness to the characteristics and needs of local communities.

Whether school choice and a diversity of providers leads to innovation and a better match between the educational offer and local needs in practice, depends on a variety of factors, notably the capacity of school leadership (OECD, 2017[39]; Lubienski, 2003[40]). Although the capacity of schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community to capitalise on these opportunities can be further strengthened, the schools' autonomy provides them with a good basis to tailor their profiles to local needs.

A range of efforts are undertaken to prevent school failure and facilitate students' transitions beyond school

The German-speaking Community recognises the importance of addressing school failure and facilitating students' successful transitions across levels of education and into the labour market (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]). A range of initiatives and educational offers have been developed to prevent drop-out and provide students who are struggling to complete regular schooling with alternative pathways to educational and professional opportunities. This includes part-time vocational education, the supervision offered by the Time-Out centre, and the one-year pre-vocational programme offered by the ZAWM Centre for Training and Continuing Education.

The German-speaking Community has also been responsive to performance deficits that were detected, for example, in the context of international student assessments. In light of the decreasing share of top-performers in recent waves of PISA, the German-speaking Community's latest regional development concept (REK III) included several initiatives aimed at improving performance in reading and in the MINTH (mathematics, informatics, natural sciences, technology and crafts) subjects to be implemented in 2019-24 (MDG, 2019[1]). This included additional extra-curricular activities, such as competitions, for gifted students, additional training for MINTH teachers and improved equipment for school labs. Although the initiatives had not been evaluated at the time of the review, they signal a commitment to respond to deficits whenever they are detected.

In addition, as described above, a wide range of initiatives bring together actors from education institutions, businesses, the ministry, private and public agencies to provide students with career guidance. If well-delivered, career guidance services, both inside and outside of schools, can have a formative influence on young people's understanding of the world of work and improve their educational, social and economic outcomes (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]). Providing strong guidance for students is particularly important in a system like the German-speaking Community, where students are faced with important decisions at multiple points in their educational pathways. Although there remains potential to evaluate more systematically the extent to which these services meet students' needs and to strengthen the link between guidance provided within and outside of schools (as discussed further below), the broad range of existing initiatives is testament to a commitment, shared by many actors in the system, to help all students succeed in their educational pathways.

Challenges

The education system lacks a clear vision to guide and lend coherence to reform initiatives

The German-speaking Community currently lacks a widely known, clearly articulated vision for the education system that could help to guide, prioritise and lend coherence to reforms and foster a shared understanding of their goals among the various stakeholders concerned. Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019[1]) and the government's working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]). Both list a series of reform projects for the education sector and the envisaged timeline for their implementation, although the projects detailed in the two documents only partially overlap and show little alignment. In interviews, the OECD review team confirmed the impression that there was some uncertainty among stakeholders about the relationship between the two strategic documents and which of the two should be seen as authoritative.[18]

It is common for public authorities in OECD countries to establish formal strategies setting out policy initiatives for a period of 5-10 years, often associated with timelines, milestones and budgets. A critical element of such strategic documents, however, is the articulation of the broader goals that these initiatives are intended to accomplish, as well as an explanation of why those goals are desirable (OECD, 2013[42]). Neither of the two strategic documents (LAP or REK III) clearly articulates the overarching goals for the education system that the proposed reforms are designed to accomplish.

The previous volume of the Community's regional development concept (REK II) in 2015 had included three broad goals for the education sector (educational equity, educational quality and practical vocational training) (MDG, 2015, p. 37[43]) as well as a two-page vision statement (the *Leitbild* "*Bildungsregion DG – Unser Zukunftskapital*"), which was developed in 2008 and comprises 19 statements of intent (MDG, 2009[44]). While this vision statement identifies important priorities, its 19 objectives are too numerous to be easily grasped, particularly since they are presented without clear prioritisation or overarching, structuring ideas (MDG, 2015, p. 25[43]). In addition, the 19 objectives formulated in the vision are highly heterogeneous. Some of the objectives are sufficiently general to be sustained over time and appear to reflect broad values that could guide policy making in a range of contexts (e.g. objective 6: "We enable the integrated education of students with special education needs" or objective 7: "We want to actively promote the ability to deal with conflict at all levels in order to understand a constructive culture of debate as enriching our everyday dialogues"). Others describe specific policy initiatives (e.g. objective 15: "We want to raise the quality and transparency of our continuing professional learning programs for teachers by employing a central partner for processing and co-ordination tasks"). By contrast, other OECD countries typically focus on a relatively small and more manageable number of fundamental goals. For example, in its Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, Estonia introduces a succinct vision of lifelong learning in 2020 and derives from this five strategic goals, with several "strategic measures" linked to each of them (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2014[45]).

While the REK II vision statement was intended to inform policy development until 2025, the OECD review team did not form the impression that it was widely known within the system or that it constituted a reference point either for policy development or for the day-to-day work of various stakeholders. It is not clear either in what sense the latest volume of the development concept (REK III) draws on the vision statement and the reform initiatives it presents are not linked explicitly to the three goals formulated in the REK II. Although the REK III proposes to prioritise the development of an overall vision (the *Gesamtvision* discussed above) to structure reform processes until 2030, it is not clear whether this overall vision, as it is currently planned could fill the vacuum left by the Community's lack of an effective statement on the system's goals, underpinning values or guiding principles (MDG, 2019[1]).

So far, the lack of a widely recognised vision and overarching goals for the education system has reduced the Community's capacity to lend coherence and direction to reform processes and mobilise actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations for the education system. It may have also created a sense of uncertainty about the direction of reforms among stakeholders and made it more difficult to communicate the rationale of planned reforms. Ideally, at the highest level, the vision for the education system should be broad enough to act a relevant reference point for various elements of the education system, including, of course, the curriculum, but also the evaluation framework and reform of the teacher competency framework (AHS, 2005[46]). In the absence of this widely recognised vision, different actors in the German-speaking Community have, over the years, developed their own implicit or explicit vision statements to guide their work in different education sectors and for different purposes in relative independent of one another. This includes, for example, the initial reflections on the GPGS teacher reform project, led by a steering group (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[47]), as well as the vision for the education system developed by the Economic and Social Council (*Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat*, WSR) informing the structural reform of vocational education.[19]

While the development of ad hoc visions by multiple stakeholders and sectors in the German-speaking Community is a testament to their high level of motivation and commitment to improving the system, these different visions appear disconnected from each other. The steering of education policy would benefit from a more coherent articulation of overarching priorities and high-level, broadly accepted goals or values that could create guide ongoing initiatives across the entire education system and allow different actors to rally around a shared cause. The development of the *Gesamtvision* thus provides a much-needed opportunity to create a strategy to lend coherence to future reform projects and school improvement efforts, but also to develop a long-term vision for the education system. For either to be successful and stand up to the test of time, they should be the outcome not only of a process of reflection and analysis, but also consultations and co-development processes involving a wide range of stakeholders including students, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff, school leaders, social partners, business, policy makers. As described further below, the success of a strategic vision is as dependent on its substance as it is dependent on the process by which it is developed, socialised and implemented (OECD, 2013[42]).

The limited availability of data on student and school performance reduces transparency and makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate educational quality and equity

In recent decades, many education systems worldwide have undertaken efforts to make their education policy, management and practice more evidence and data-based (Lawn, 2013[48]; Sahlberg, 2016[49]; Williamson, 2017[50]). In OECD countries, this trend has often been accompanied by the development or expansion of central data infrastructures and information management systems to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools. In addition, an increasing amount of digital data on schools are generated and can be managed, compiled and processed, for example in data dashboards or other management tools (Hartong and Förschler, 2019[51]). Collecting and disseminating data on educational quality, learning environments and resource use in schools can foster transparency and inform decision making at all levels of the system.

In comparison to other OECD countries, both the availability of data on educational quality and the capacity to analyse it at the central and school level are limited in the German-speaking Community. As described in Chapter 1, in contrast to most OECD countries, the German-speaking Community does not use standardised central examinations with formal consequence for students at the upper secondary level (OECD, 2013, p. 155[52]). Instead, students participate in a number of standardised assessments without stakes. This includes comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8), as well as international standardised assessments, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year-olds' performance in mathematics, science and reading, and tests for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF). In contrast to the French and

Flemish Communities, the German-speaking Community does not participate in international comparative assessments at the primary level (e.g. the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessments of 4th grade students in mathematics, science and reading).

Although school leaders and teachers appear to recognise the value of standardised assessment (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]), their capacity to use the results to drive school and system-level improvement could be strengthened. School leaders and teachers receive the results of their schools' VERA tests and the Community provides secondary schools with individualised reports of their PISA results, which are prepared in collaboration with the Université de Liège. However, school leaders are provided with little guidance on how to interpret this data and use it for school improvement. The PISA assessment is designed to provide representative results and policy-relevant insights at the system level. Although several countries participating in PISA have chosen to provide school leaders with PISA data for their schools (usually as a means to encourage and acknowledge the schools' participation in the survey), the relatively small samples in each school mean that, in many cases, results need to be interpreted with great care due to their large error margins. Given the methodological challenges and limitations involved in reporting these results, it is vital to ensure that school leaders are equipped to interpret them correctly and to complement them with other means of monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of learning in schools.

Besides the results of standardised assessments, very little data on educational performance and other relevant concepts is available, even at the central level, and the scope for international benchmarking is limited. For example, no data is collected on individual students' performance, school-leaving qualifications or socio-economic background, the incidence of grade repetition, average class sizes, or the number of vacant staff positions across the school network (MDG, 2022[5]). Likewise, the Community does not have a data infrastructure in place that would allow for the longitudinal analysis of students' pathways across primary and secondary education or a systematic data collection on school-to-work transitions (this is partly due to difficulties of tracking students leaving to enter tertiary education outside the Germans-speaking Community). This also means that there is no systematic monitoring of the number of students leaving school without a certificate. Monitoring students' educational choices and their movements across pathways is particularly important since they can be important sources of inequity in stratified school systems. In addition, the lack of a central education database makes it difficult for the ministry to relate school performance results to data on school characteristics, such as their financial resources, staffing, or social composition. Strengthening this evidence base would be an important condition for monitoring equity and efficiency in the school system more continuously.

As described above, the lack of an overarching longer-term strategy and widely agreed-upon goals for the education system makes it difficult for the Community to focus its very limited capacity on the collection and evaluation of data that matter the most. For example, one of the few additional measures available to monitor performance at the school level is the proportion of students who are enrolled below the year in which they would be expected, based on their age (*Schulrückstand*). However, as described above, this indicator is not equivalent to the incidence of grade repetition, which diminishes its value for system-level monitoring (and international benchmarking). Clear goals with associated indicators would enable the ministry to collect data that is well aligned to allow monitoring the progress towards the system's most important goals.

However, setting targets alone is not sufficient if they are not accompanied by a clear commitment to measuring progress and evaluating their attainment. This has not always been the case in the past. The Community's first regional development concept (2009-2014, REK I) had, for example, included the target to reduce the share of 15-year-olds enrolled below their age's typical grade level to the OECD average by 2020 (MDG, 2011[53]). Yet, there has been no systematic measurement and reporting on the target's attainment or decision on follow-up measures.

Several OECD countries have developed such embedded long-term strategies to collect, analyse, and disseminate data and research, linked to their systems' overall objectives (OECD, 2013[52]). Unlike the German-speaking Community, many OECD countries also regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective tools to track progress on key indicators once clear goals and measurable targets have been identified.

Despite the school system's emphasis on parental choice, little information on the quality and performance of schools is published. As a result, some parents reported to the OECD review team that they did not feel in a position to make a well-informed choice between different schools. While the external school evaluation regularly releases reports summarising their findings at the system level, the German-speaking Community does not publish external evaluation findings for individual schools. Publishing evaluation reports has become increasingly common among European school systems as it allows parents to use evaluation results when choosing a school and following quality developments once their children are enrolled (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2020[54]; OECD, 2013, p. 457[55]).

In countries like the Netherlands (Gouëdard, 2021[56]), the UK, the US or Australia, a range of school-level performance indicators are routinely collected and published on interactive websites. This can include the schools' latest evaluation reports and, in some cases, student assessment results. To contextualise this information, it is usually accompanied by a presentation of the schools' characteristics (e.g. student enrolments, students' backgrounds, the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff, secondary school outcomes and leavers' destinations etc.) as well as, in some cases, information on school finances (e.g. the income they receive from different sources).[20] Several federal states in Germany, including Hamburg and Berlin, have also started publishing performance data of their schools in recent years. In Berlin, a dedicated website shows the most recent inspection results for each school, alongside students' test results (e.g. higher education entrance exams or intermediate school-leaving certificates), and selected characteristics of the student body, including, for example, common places of residence, absenteeism rates and the share of students with a home language other than German (Helbig and Nikolai, 2017[57]).[21]

While the publication of school-level information on student performance can increase transparency and accountability in theory, publishing performance data can have unintended consequences since it can easily be subject to erroneous interpretation, particularly if the results are not adjusted for students' socio-economic background (Musset, 2012[58]; OECD, 2013[55]). The Community does not currently collect data on students' socio-economic background, which makes the contextualised presentation of school performance more difficult. As explained in Chapter 3, this also limits the Community's ability to put the outcomes of standardised tests into perspective or provide additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged students and those with the highest needs.

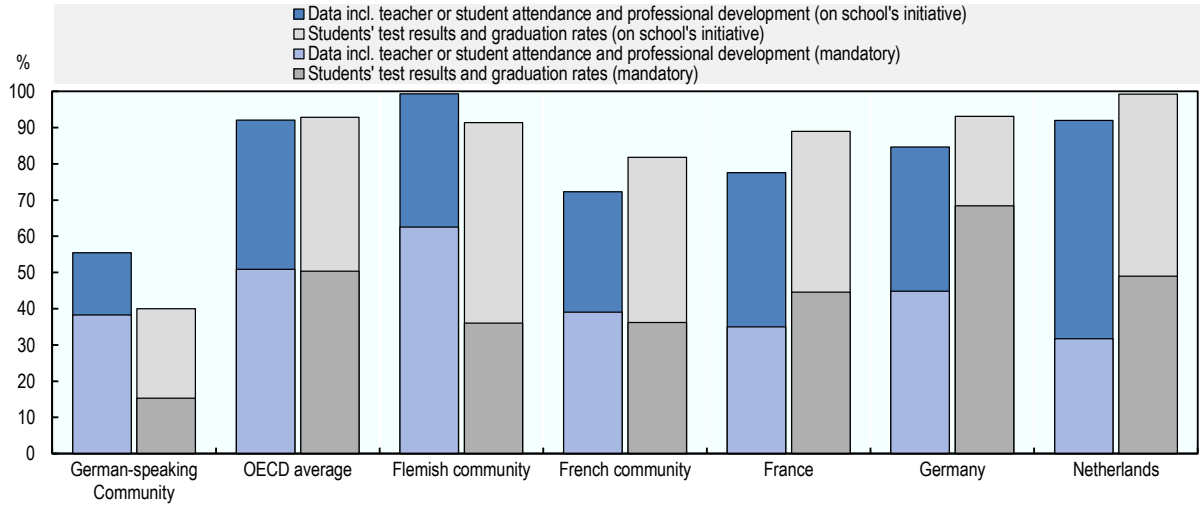
The limited collection of data not only reduces the capacity to monitor quality at the system level, but also at the school level. While schools engage in regular self-evaluations, only a minority systematically collect data for quality assurance and school improvement purposes. As can be seen, in Figure 2.6, only little more than half of 15-year-old students in the Community (56%) attended secondary schools whose principal reported to collect data, such as teacher or student attendance, and professional development (17% of them on their own initiative), compared to 92% on average across the OECD. Likewise, in only 40% of cases did secondary schools systematically record students' test results and graduation rates (the majority on their own initiative). This stands in sharp contrast to the proportion of students whose schools collected this important information on average across the OECD (93%), but also in the Flemish Community (91%), the French Community (81%), and neighbouring countries such as Germany (93%), France (89%), and the Netherlands (99%).

The need to further strengthen schools in their ability to understand and use data – both qualitative and quantitative – has also been confirmed in external evaluation reports (Cormann and Goor, 2021[25]). While schools are informed about their results in standardised assessments, like VERA, the results are not systematically followed up on or taken as a basis to inform school development (VDI Technologiezentrum,

2020[26]). Likewise, the results of both internal and external evaluations constitute an important source of data on the management and quality of teaching in schools. Yet, interviews with stakeholders suggested that many schools do not use the information generated during the evaluation process to its full potential and that some schools perceive the process primarily as an administrative requirement or an instrument of control, rather than a source of information that can inform their continuing improvement (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the school evaluation system).

Figure 2.6. Recording student outcomes and other quality assurance data in schools, 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report to systematically collect data on the following



Source: OECD (2020[17]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.8.11 and V.B1.8.11.

StatLink https://stat.link/4mqf3s

An effective use of data in school systems also extends to the valuable knowledge that teachers and school leaders gain in their everyday work. Systematising, evaluating, codifying and sharing this knowledge, for example concerning promising practices or schools' experience with pilot projects, can be tremendously helpful for other actors in the system. The Community has made use of pilot projects when introducing several of its reform initiatives, including the provision of additional personnel for inclusive education in two mainstream primary schools, the provision of digital resources through the *École Numérique* programme, the introduction of the external evaluation starting in 2006/07 and bilingual instruction in primary education since 2011/12 (MDG, 2022[5]). Nevertheless, there is scope to further strengthen the use of pilots when rolling out reform initiatives (e.g. mentoring for new teachers, as described in Chapter 4), to more systematically engage in rigorous evaluations of these pilot projects and to ensure that the results are mobilised to the benefit of the entire system. The same goes for the evaluation of policy initiatives more generally, including the impact of services, like the Time-Out programme, that have not yet been evaluated.

There is limited transparency over the levels of funding across schools and school networks

There is no regular monitoring or central reporting framework covering all schools' overall revenues and expenditures in the German-speaking Community. While the ministry has the means to calculate the amount of funding that each school (or municipality, in the case of OSU schools) receives from the

Community budget, schools of the OSU and FSU networks are not required to systematically report on additional resources they receive from other sources. As a result, central authorities in the Community have no full visibility over the level of resources received by individual schools or systematic funding differences across schools and school networks. In combination with the limited data on students' and schools' performance discussed above, this limits the Community's ability to relate schools' inputs to outputs, to evaluate the effectiveness of their resource use and to detect potential mismatches between schools' resources and their needs.

While schools' staff expenditure is funded by the Community on the same basis for schools of all three networks, the mechanisms used to fund other expenditures differ between the schools of the GUW network and those of the OSU and FSU networks. GUW schools receive their remaining funding in the form of a negotiated block grant (*Funktionsdotation*) intended to cover operating expenditure and minor capital expenses, which can be renegotiated and increased over the course of the year if the original funding is not sufficient. Larger capital expenses in GUW schools (e.g. for infrastructure developments) are reimbursed by the Community at a rate of 100%. By contrast, schools of the OSU and FSU networks receive their funding for operating expenditure based on a formula and their capital funding based on individual requests that are reimbursed by the Community – if accepted by the minister – at a rate of 60% (for moveable equipment) and 80% (for larger infrastructural investments). Both OSU and FSU schools can receive additional resources from their school providers (the municipalities and the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools BSDG, respectively). Although FSU schools do not currently receive any supplementary financial support from the church, the OECD review team learned that municipalities are, in principle, obliged to compensate local FSU schools for some of the financial support they provide to their own OSU schools.[22]

Paired with the limited transparency on the levels of school funding, the differences in funding arrangements across the three networks have led to uncertainty among stakeholders over the relative levels of financial resources available to schools in the German-speaking Community. FSU and OSU schools receive less funding from the Community for capital expenditures than GUW schools since the Community covers only 80% of their infrastructure costs. It is not fully transparent whether and to what extent this difference is made up for by the amount of their formula-based operating grant relative to the negotiated block grant received by GUW schools. Likewise, there is no transparency (either to the public or the ministry) over the amount of funding that the different municipalities provide for their local primary schools, which could give rise to further discrepancies between the levels of funding received by OSU and FSU schools, as well as across OSU schools in different municipalities. Depending on the network they belong to, a primary or secondary school might therefore receive different levels of funding, although the currently available data does not permit to verify whether this is the case in practice.

In interviews with stakeholders, the OECD review team gained the impression that this lack of transparency risks fuelling mistrust and – among representatives of different networks – a sense of being placed at a financial disadvantage. In addition, stakeholders expressed concerns about potential imbalances in the amount of funding received by schools of different sizes. In light of the Community's commitment to maintaining a dense network of primary schools that includes smaller rural schools, having a more complete picture of per-student expenditure across these different schools will be important to assess whether all schools are adequately resourced to offer high-quality teaching.

The school funding mechanisms serve overlapping purposes and create a high administrative burden for schools and central authorities

As described above, schools, particularly those of the OSU and FSU network, receive their resources through a number of distinct funding streams. In addition to their formula-based staff allocation and operating funding, they receive earmarked funding per-student to cover expenses on pedagogical

materials and (in pre-primary and primary education) “to reduce school attendance costs in pre-primary and primary education”, i.e. to cover costs that would have previously been borne by parents.

In addition, schools can tap into targeted purpose-bound funding for additional contract staff (BVA), innovative projects, school equipment (such as furniture and ICT equipment), lunch break supervision and infrastructural investments. With the exception of infrastructure investments for GUW schools, which are covered directly by the government, schools need to submit reimbursement requests for each of these types of expenditure to be reviewed and approved directly by the minister. This creates a significant administrative burden for school leaders and central authorities alike.

Targeted funding streams are popular in many OECD countries since they give central authorities an opportunity to steer how resources are used and since they can be introduced flexibly to respond to needs and policy priorities as they emerge (OECD, 2017[12]). However, they can come at the price of administrate burdens – both on the part of schools who may need to apply for targeted funding – and on the part of authorities charged with monitoring and holding schools to account to ensure that the funding is used for its intended purpose. An administratively intense process can discourage schools – particularly those who may be most in need of additional resources – from applying for targeted funding. In interviews with the OECD review team, school leaders expressed their frustration with the time-consuming and burdensome process of applying for the approval even of minor capital expenditures.

A proliferation of targeted funds can also reduce the transparency of the funding mechanism and constrain school leaders’ ability to exercise discretion over the use of their funds based on their schools’ needs. School leaders in the German-speaking Community, for example, complained about the lack of flexibility when trying to hire additional or more qualified staff to engage in lunch break supervision, which they deemed to be important for the well-being of their students.

In addition, the different funding streams in the German-speaking Community do not always have clearly delineated purposes. For example, the types of expenditures that schools can use their main operating grant for, are not clearly defined.[23] Likewise, the two formula-based grants intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contributions can, in practice, be used to fund similar types of expenditures. While this gives school leaders some more flexibility in the use of these funds, it calls into question the reason why they should be distributed separately from schools’ main operating grant, given the administrative burden that monitoring the use of targeted funding, at least in theory, entails.

The main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage

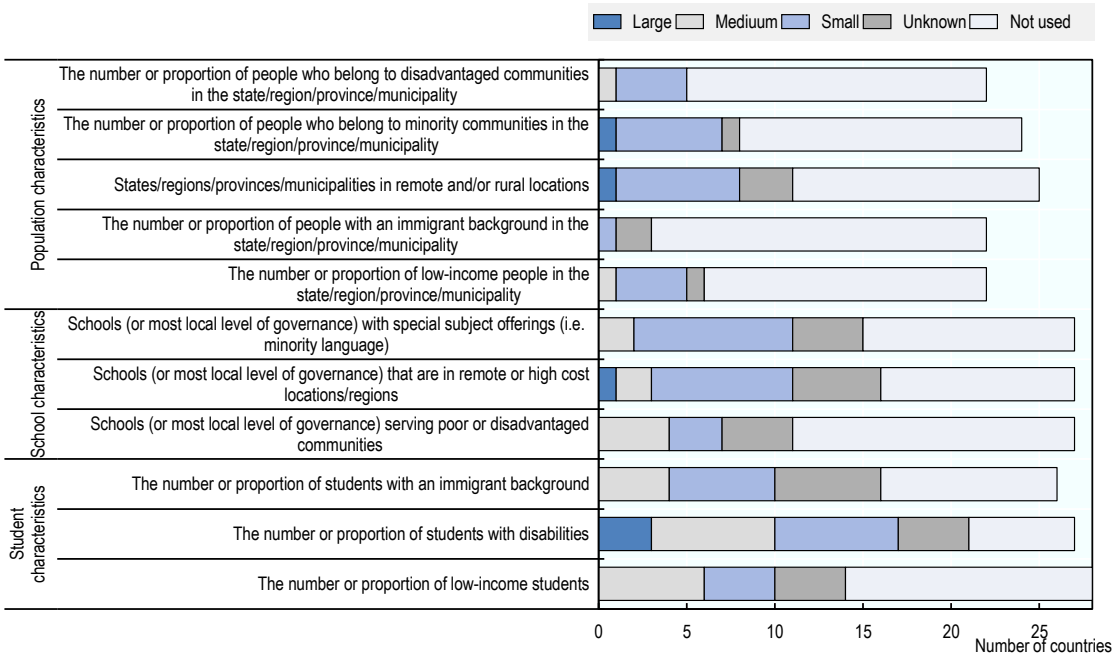
A key concern in the design of school funding mechanisms is to ensure that resources are allocated equitably. This requires attention to both horizontal equity (i.e. ensuring that similar levels of resources are allocated to similar types of provision) and vertical equity (i.e. allocating different levels of resources to student groups with different needs). Providing high-quality education to students with certain characteristics or schools in specific contexts may require more resources than it does to provide the same quality of education for another student in another school. PISA results indicate that the risk of low performance is significantly higher for students with certain characteristics related, among others, to their social and economic background, their gender, immigrant status or special education needs (OECD, 2019[59]). At the school and local level, the resources required to provide high-quality education can be affected by the level of urbanisation, the size of schools, their educational offer, as well as their capacity to raise additional revenues. Providing additional resources to disadvantaged schools or schools serving disadvantaged student populations can significantly reduce gaps in educational achievement and students’ economic outcomes (Jackson, Johnson and Persico, 2016[60]; Lafortune, Rothstein and Schanzenbach, 2018[61]). A key concern in promoting equity is therefore to design funding mechanisms that allocate resources equitably to schools that are most in need of additional support (OECD, 2017[12]).

The German-speaking Community is an outlier among OECD countries in that its main funding allocation mechanisms for staff resources and schools' operating grants do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage at the student or school level (De Witte et al., 2017[62]). Although some funding is available for language classes of immigrant students and schools can request additional staff resources, for example to support students with special education needs, the main funding mechanism for staff resources and schools' operating grant does not account for characteristics that may give rise to additional resource needs. Additional analyses and careful monitoring would be needed to evaluate whether the level of resources allocated for students with SEN and newly arrived immigrant students is sufficient and whether they reach the schools and students most in need of additional support (see Chapter 3). For students who do not belong to these groups, however, it is unusual that no compensatory funding is provided in the German-speaking Community at all.

Typically, OECD countries allocate equity funding using a mixture of targeted funding and resources channelled through their main allocation mechanism (e.g. by including weightings in the funding formula to systematically allocate additional resources to certain types of students or schools) (OECD, 2017[12]). As can be seen in Figure 2.7, countries use a range of criteria to allocate equity funding, which may be based on the population of the area the school is based in (state/region/province/municipality), the school itself or the students enrolled. Of the 26 countries and economies with available data on the allocation of equity funding by central and state governments, 25 use at least one criterion related to student characteristics, 23 use at least one criterion based on school characteristics and 14 use at least one criterion based on population characteristics (OECD, 2021, pp. 422, Table D6.3[10]).

Figure 2.7. Share of total funding allocated by central and state governments to primary and lower secondary educational institutions by equity criteria, 2019

Based on 31 OECD and partner countries and economies with available information



Source: OECD (2021[10]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en, Figure D6.4 and Table D6.3.

StatLink https://stat.link/da4f3m

Funding schools solely based on student numbers can have some unintended consequences that risk to undermine equity. Most importantly, it places schools with a higher proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds at a disadvantage since these students are, on average, more costly to educate (OECD, 2017[12]). In combination with free school choice, unweighted per-capita funding can set in motion a vicious cycle as schools in difficult circumstances and without adequate compensation may lose students to schools with a more advantaged student population, thus further reducing their funding (Weiß, 2012[63]). A socially indexed allocation of teachers and needs-based equity funding could be instruments to avoid such effects and to support schools serving heterogeneous student populations (Weishaupt, 2020[64]).

Another potential source of financial inequity are parental co-payments in secondary education. There is currently no central guidance on the types of costs that secondary schools can pass on to parents and evidence suggests that parental co-payments for school materials, school trips etc. at this level are higher than at the more regulated primary level. Particularly in vocational pathways, parents also usually need to cover some costs for equipment and stakeholders reported that, even in primary education, some parents face difficulties covering costs that accrue, e.g. for school materials, trips or even photocopying charges. A 2017 online survey of parents suggested that parental contributions were widespread and elevated at the less regulated secondary level and 10% of respondents reported that the costs were a source of financial pressure (Bertrand and Daron, 2017[65]). Despite the ministry's efforts to collect this data from schools, oversight remains limited and no precise picture of the costs that primary and secondary schools pass on to parents had been created at the time of the review (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]).

A lack of systematic co-ordination and communication between key actors in the system limits synergies and the spread of good practices

As described above, a wide range of actors and institutions are involved in the governance and evaluation of schools in the German-speaking Community, bringing together a significant range of competences and experiences. Key actors include the different departments within the ministry, the school development counselling service, the AHS with the external evaluation and the pedagogical advisory service, the ZFP's competency centre, Kaleido, as well as various groups representing key stakeholders of the system. Although many of these actors stand in frequent exchange with one another, the OECD review team noticed several instances where a lack of co-ordination and information flow between them was apparent. This concerned the exchange between different departments of the ministry in matters of mutual interest (e.g. between the department of youth and culture and the more strictly school-related departments), but also the involvement of relevant stakeholders in important projects, such as the revision of the core curricula. While the German-speaking Community's small size allows for personal relationships to be formed between a wide range of actors – a fact that was widely appreciated by the OECD's interview partners – there is a risk that the exchange of information and involvement of relevant actors occurs on an ad hoc rather than a systematic basis. For processes like the development and implementation of an overall vision, or the reform of the core curricula to be successful, these relationships might need to be further strengthened and institutionalised to ensure that relevant actors are systematically involved and information flows are ensured.

The organisation of schools in three separate networks also makes the exchange of experiences and good practices across schools an important priority for the German-speaking Community. While each of the school networks organises opportunities for their school leaders to exchange it will be important to further strengthen the exchange of good practices across school networks. The OECD review team encountered many examples of schools engaging in innovative and promising initiatives (e.g. schools introducing mentorship schemes for new teachers or engaging in project-based interdisciplinary work), but there appeared to be no effective mechanism to ensure that other schools and the system as a whole could benefit from them. The school development counselling service or the pedagogical advisory service could presumably play a stronger role in the diffusion of good practices if they were provided with sufficient

capacity (see Chapter 4). Several OECD countries have undertaken efforts to strengthen this kind of information sharing in recent years. In Iceland, for example, the "Education Plaza/ Menntamiðja" project organised by the ministry collects best practices and disseminates using social media (OECD, 2021[66]). Likewise, Denmark's introduction of a corps of learning consultants, described in Box 2.3, could offer some inspiration on ways in which external support could help schools learn from each other's experience.

Box 2.3. Learning consultants supporting municipalities and schools in Denmark

The Danish Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality has introduced a national body of about 80 learning consultants in 2014 to provide support to municipalities and schools for quality development, to spread good practices, and to facilitate school networking and peer-learning. Both schools and municipalities can ask for the support of a learning consultant and schools can also work together in groups with a learning consultant. Learning consultants work in teams and analyse the challenges a school faces based on school data and information on student performance. They then develop a school development plan, a strategy for change management, and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Learning consultants collaborate with a ministerial research centre to learn about the latest evidence and to feed into the knowledge available in the research centre. They also collaborate with teacher training institutions to develop links between theory and practice.

Learning consultants have diverse backgrounds, from teaching and school leadership to local administration in a municipality. They receive training and capacity building for their role and meet on a monthly basis to learn about new methods and evidence and to reflect about their experiences and challenges. Learning consultants can work in different arrangements. For example, learning consultants can work for two days a week in their learning consultant role at the ministry and for three days a week in the field. Learning consultants are typically hired for two years after which they return to a school or municipality. This allows the ministry to adjust the number and profile of learning consultants depending on the demand and also helps spread knowledge more widely across the system. Some municipalities in Denmark, such as Copenhagen, have developed and implemented their own systems of learning consultants to facilitate leadership and specialist advice to schools from practitioners with high credibility.

Source: Nusche, D. et al. (2016[67]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Denmark 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264262430-en.

Students' transitions across levels of education could benefit from a more systematic and sustained collaboration among educators

As described above, the German-speaking Community has undertaken efforts to ease students' transition from pre-primary to primary education and promote pedagogical continuity. Pre-primary staff is encouraged, for example, to review the core curricula and competency goals for the first year of primary education, just as primary school teachers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the developmental goals for pre-primary education (MDG, 2022[5]). Towards the end of the school year, some schools also organise joint activities involving children from the last year of pre-primary school and the first year of primary school. Particularly in the last year of the pre-primary education, this co-operation between the pedagogical staff in kindergarten and primary school is of great importance.

Nevertheless, in interviews with principals, teachers, and parents, the OECD review team gained the impression that a sustained collaboration of staff across levels over the course of children's last year of pre-primary education was not institutionalised and systematic across all schools. Instead, collaboration across levels appeared to be primarily sustained by the initiative of individual staff members and the OECD team saw little evidence of professional exchange on best practices in other education systems or schools.

The Community has many promising examples of successful transition management practices, notably among its campus schools. Raising awareness of these practices and helping other schools adopt them could further strengthen students' transitions across the system (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 54[26]; Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]).

In OECD countries with a successful transition management, this often includes sustained collaboration between educators and teachers of both levels, based on a plan that is prepared jointly and regularly updated, as well as the co-operation with parents in order to promote the development of children based on their individual needs (OECD, 2019[68]; OECD, 2021[69]). In many European countries, this co-operation between kindergarten and primary schools has been strengthened and institutionalised over time (OECD, 2021[69]). (The transition of students with special educational needs and their integration in regular schools are described in Chapter 3).

Despite a strong VET system, the status of vocational education remains low and there are concerns that students are oriented away from vocational training

The German-speaking Community's school system is stratified and students are streamed into separate pathways at the beginning of secondary education, typically at age 12. This important inflection point occurs early in students' careers, compared to the majority of EU and OECD countries, which start tracking at age 15 or 16 (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2020[54]). Although the Community's students show good overall performance and socio-economic performance differences are relatively small, early tracking of students can have adverse effects on equality and student achievement, especially for those with an immigrant background (OECD, 2018[70]; Matthewes, 2021[71]; Hanushek and Woessmann, 2006[72]).

Unlike in some other systems with an early age of tracking, students in the German-speaking Community have the option to switch pathways as they progress through the school system. Nevertheless, the tracking of students into A and B streams, can have the unintended consequence of creating a hierarchy among educational pathways and stigmatising the attendance of the B-stream and further vocational education. Furthermore, no data is being collected on the number of students who successfully make these transitions in practice and, for example, move on to general upper secondary education after enrolling in the B-stream in lower secondary education. The extent to which the theoretical permeability of the system is realised in practice is therefore difficult to gauge. Yet, the experience of other OECD systems, such as Germany (Nikolai, 2019[73]) or Austria (Ebner, Graf and Nikolai, 2013[34]), suggests that the early sorting of students into hierarchically organised pathways always carries the risk of stigmatising those entering the "lower-ability" tracks. In addition, as in many other school systems, the probability of entering the general track in the German-speaking Community is associated with students' socio-economic status, which raises concerns for equity (De Witte et al., 2018, p. 16[27]). A more rigorous monitoring of students' pathway choices than is currently undertaken in the German-speaking Community would be necessary to identify equity challenges where they exist.

Although the German-speaking Community's tracking system allows for students to switch pathways later on, it is worth pointing out that many European education systems allow students to learn together for a longer period of time, i.e. allowing more time before they are divided into different pathways. After the Second World War and again after the upheavals in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989/90, most European countries established comprehensive school systems that separate students into different educational pathways only at a later stage in their school careers (Hörner et al., 2015[74]). Examples are countries in Scandinavia, but also the Netherlands, the United Kingdom or France, the southern European countries and some central and Eastern European countries such as Estonia, Poland or Slovenia. An early age of tracking comparable with that in the German-speaking Community also exists in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and in some Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic or Hungary (Hörner et al., 2015[74]). As discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3, high-performing

school systems increasingly recognise the importance of trying to support all students through differentiated forms of teaching, which can be realised in a comprehensive system without resorting to ability sorting.

In addition to the risk of stigmatising students, there are long-standing concerns about the status of vocational education in the German-speaking Community (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]; RdJ, 2020[75]). Despite the VET sector's close links to the labour market and a high level of engagement among local firms, there is a widespread perception that the status of VET in the Community remains low (lower, for example, than in Germany). Stakeholders expressed concerns that vocational training was still often regarded – by parents and teachers alike – to be a second-best option for weaker students – and the number of apprentices is decreasing (IAWM, 2021[32]). Between 2010/11 and 2020/21, the number of apprentices at the IAWM decreased by 35% (from 723 to 473), significantly more than the 16% drop in secondary students over the same time period (MDG, 2022[5]). Although 243 new apprenticeship contracts were signed in 2020, 125 positions remained unfilled, following 139 unfilled positions in the previous year (IAWM, 2021[32]).

The German-speaking Community's education system emphasises academic qualifications. All three of the upper secondary pathways allow students to enter higher education (OECD, 2018, p. 12[76]) and different stakeholders, including students and student representatives, reported that students in secondary education were sometimes oriented away from vocational pathways and not sufficiently supported in their choice of vocational fields. Multiple stakeholders suggested that the per-student funding system may create perverse incentives to keep students in academic pathways, even if transfers to a different school with a vocational track may more closely correspond to their interests and talents. Representatives of the business community echoed this concern and felt as though the opportunities offered by apprenticeships were not sufficiently communicated (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]).

Career guidance could benefit from greater co-ordination among its providers and a better integration into schools

According to the ministry, one of the greatest challenges for students' transition into the labour market is to navigate existing information and support services (MDG, 2022[5]). In a 2018 survey conducted by the Community's Economic and Social Council, a third of 17 and 18-year-olds did not feel adequately informed about their options for further study and professional opportunities (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat, 2018, p. 24[77]). The perceived lack of guidance, particularly on vocational education, has been criticised by students, parents and businesses (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]) and confirmed in OECD interviews with stakeholders.

In 2018, 12.9% of apprentices in the German-speaking Community dropped out and terminated their contracts ahead of time (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat, 2018[77]). This drop-out rate is comparable to that of Germany, where around 16% of students in VET tend to drop out of training or change their apprenticeship contracts. Nevertheless, it may point to a lack of effective career guidance. Most of those who terminated their apprenticeship contracts early had entered it with a "medium level of education" i.e. having completed at most the 4th year of general secondary education or the 5th year of vocational secondary education (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 85[26]). Of those who started their apprenticeship without a certificate of general qualification for university entrance (*Abitur*), almost one in two dropped out and around one third of those who did cited a wrong career choice as a reason (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 85[26]).

Career guidance, particularly in a system as diversified as that of the German-speaking Community, can help students navigate difficult choices about their educational pathways and future careers and help them to develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future based on their interests and talents (OECD, 2020[17]; Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020[78]). Career guidance can also assist in countering socio-economic and gender imbalances in students' choices of educational pathways or courses, as well as their study and career choices (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]). Although there are no evaluations of

socio-economic inequalities in students' pathways or career choices in the German-speaking Community, a lack of career guidance is known to affect disadvantage students most severely. Studies of teenagers show that they overwhelmingly turn to their parents to discuss their career plans (Baxter, 2017[79]; Oymak, 2009[80]). This is also the case in the German-speaking Community. In a 2021 survey conducted by the employment agency and Kaleido, 72% of graduates reported to have sought career advice from family members and acquaintances – the most frequently cited sources of information (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021, p. 13[81]).[24] While parents can play a critical role in guiding their children and developing their capacity to aspire, their advice and help is constrained by parents' experiences and networks (Blenkinsop et al., 2006[82]) and many young people, especially those in greatest need of support, do not draw on parental counsel at all (Rennison et al., 2005[83]; Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020[78]).

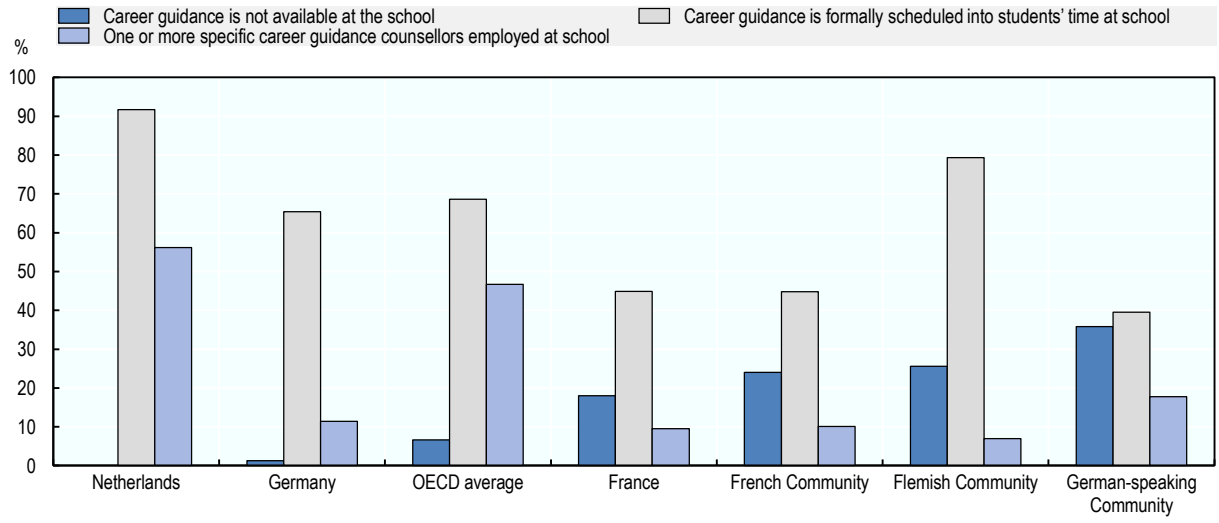
As described above, a wide range of actors in the German-speaking Community offer career guidance to students, including the employment agency, Kaleido, the IAWM, youth information centres, the business development agency and the chamber of commerce and industry. While the quantity of perspectives and information on careers in the German-speaking Community is therefore less of a concern, ensuring that relevant information reaches the students that need it the most remains a challenge. Given the various actors involved in offering career guidance, stakeholders have expressed concerns about the complementarity of the different forms of advice on offer. Although different actors have made attempts to co-ordinate their activities in this domain, for example through the Study Group School and Economy, the services offered are not always clearly differentiated, e.g. in terms of the age groups they target.

Another challenge is to ensure that all students obtain the career guidance support they need and are successfully exposed to the world of work. This requires schools to reach out to people in work and employers to engage with schools in order to link career guidance provided in schools with practical insights into the world of work (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]). As it stands, despite the impressive range of motivated actors involved, much of the career guidance offered in the German-speaking Community requires students or their parents to take the initiative and actively seek out support. In the aforementioned 2021 survey, only 12% of graduates reported to have obtained career advice through information events and individual counselling, respectively, which suggests that a large part of the student population does not take advantage of these offers (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021[81]).

In-school career guidance, by contrast, is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions. In the aforementioned Community-wide survey, just 17% of graduates reported to have obtained career advice from teachers (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021[81]). According to principals' reports in the 2018 PISA survey, 35.8% of 15-year-old students attended a school where career guidance was not available, compared to just 6.6% on average across the OECD (see Figure 2.8). It was less common for schools to have guidance counsellors employed at the school (17.8%) and more common – as in France and Germany – for counsellors to regularly visit the school (45.6%). Importantly, PISA 2018 suggests that the German-speaking Community relies heavily on students' own initiative to seek out career guidance (reported by the principals of 60.5% of students, compared to 31.4% across the OECD). Only 39.5% of students' schools formally scheduled time for career guidance, compared to 68.6% across the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.13[17]).

Figure 2.8. School-based career guidance in selected OECD education systems, 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report the following practices



Source: OECD (2020[17]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.4.13/16 and V.B1.4.13/16.

StatLink https://stat.link/hyns4d

Complementing the guidance offered by employment services, trade unions, voluntary organisations, private sector organisations and employers with in-school career guidance is also important to expose students to a range of different perspectives. While the career advice provided by actors outside of schools may have better links to the labour market and offer more practical insights, they may have their own interests and priorities and may provide narrower perspectives than would be desirable to guide the career choices of young people (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]). The German-speaking Community's development of an interdisciplinary core curriculum on school-based career preparation and orientation is a laudable effort to improve the connection between career advice within and outside of schools. However, stakeholders expressed concerns that the core curriculum is not sufficiently implemented in all schools. This is consistent with the challenges the Community faces in successfully implementing competency-oriented curricula and fostering the type of staff collaboration in schools that a concerted effort to career guidance would require. This challenge is addressed in more depth in Chapter 4.

Policy options

Use the development process of the Gesamtvision to provide a renewed vision for the education system, strategic guidance on education policy reforms and a basis for an actionable implementation strategy

The development of the overall vision for the education system (the *Gesamtvision*) presents a unique opportunity to drive reforms that will shape the German-speaking Community's education system for the years to come. It has the potential to build a shared understanding of the system's overarching goals and underpinning values, identify the most important challenges that the system needs to address, point to a coherent set of policy options to achieve the system's goals and provide a basis for an actionable implementation strategy (the *Master Plan* to be developed in 2023). For the *Gesamtvision* to successfully

guide, prioritise and lend coherence to education reforms and to serve as a foundation for an implementation strategy that will lead to tangible improvements in the classrooms, it will need to be well-designed with these goals in mind.

Articulate an overarching vision for the education system

A key element in the design of effective strategy documents in education policy is the articulation of a clear vision for the system, i.e. the overarching goal that the *Gesamtvision* seeks to achieve. Such vision statements serve multiple critical purposes: They provide the overarching rationale for the development of the strategy, guide the selection of focus areas for reforms, align policy actions and help to mobilise the various actors in the system around a shared aspiration. Effective vision statements tend to be concise and focus on a small number of key aspirations, sometimes underpinned by a commitment to a set of high-level values that the system seeks to embody or impart (Viennet and Pont, 2017[84]). Successful vision statements are also frequently developed through a process of wide-ranging consultations or co-development, in order to secure the ownership of the stakeholders they concern.

Several OECD countries have developed such visions as integral parts of their long-term or medium-term education strategies, often emerging from an inclusive process of reflection on the overarching goals and values for the education system. One example is included at the start of Iceland's recently developed *Education Policy 2030* strategy, which aspires "to accomplish high-quality education throughout life", and build its policies around the core values of "resilience, courage, knowledge and happiness" (OECD, 2021, p. 46[66]). To be effective, vision statements need to be easily understood, widely known and embraced by stakeholders across the education system. In the view of the OECD review team, the vision (*Leitbild*) formulated for the year 2025 in the REK II does not effectively perform this function for the German-speaking Community and the development of the *Gesamtvision* should strive to fill this gap, laying the basis for a more effective vision to guide policy beyond 2025.

Identify challenges in key policy areas and formulate specific goals aligned with the overarching vision

To provide a strong basis for an actionable implementation strategy the *Gesamtvision* will need to identify the system's most important challenges, formulate specific goals, and propose policy actions to accomplish them. It can be helpful to structure these challenges and goals around a number of thematic areas for which more specific goals should then be formulated. These are many ways in which these thematic areas could be defined. In the case of Iceland's *Education Policy 2030* strategy, key issues were organised around five pillars: (A) Equal opportunities for all, (B) Superior teaching, (C) Skills for the future, (D) Putting well-being first and (E) Quality at the forefront). Estonia organised its *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* around five strategic goals (see Box 2.4). Likewise, following the extensive consultation of stakeholders, Ireland's National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy presented key performance goals alongside a narrative justification highlighting their importance (ibid.).

Box 2.4. Strategic goals for education in Estonia and Ireland

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (LLS) served as the guiding document for the development of education policy and decisions on educational funding during the period 2014-20. The LLS was aligned with cross-sectoral reform programmes, including the National Reform Programme "Estonia 2020" and the Estonian national strategy for sustainable development ("Sustainable Estonia 21"). The LLS formulated five strategic goals:

- *Change in the approach to learning*: Implementation of an approach to learning that supports each learner's individual and social development, the acquisition of learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship at all levels and in all types of education.
- *Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership*: The compensation of teachers and school leaders including their salaries are consistent with the qualification requirements for the job and the work-related performance.
- *Alignment of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market*: Lifelong learning opportunities and career services that are diverse, flexible and of good quality, resulting in an increase in the number of people with professional or vocational qualifications in different age groups, and an increase in the overall participation in lifelong learning across Estonia.
- *A digital focus in lifelong learning*: Modern digital technology is used for learning and teaching effectively and efficiently. An improvement in the digital skills of the total population has been achieved and access to the new generation of digital infrastructure is ensured.
- *Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning*: All individuals are granted equal opportunities to participate in lifelong learning.

For each of the five strategic goals, the LLS contains a set of four to seven associated indicators and targets to be attained by 2020. For a full list of indicators, see Table 2.1 in Santiago et al. (2016[85]).

Ireland's National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020

In Ireland, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, was developed following the extensive consultation of social partners, education agencies and various stakeholders. The strategy includes performance targets to be met by 2020:

- *Primary level*: In national assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing by five percentage points the number of students performing at Level 3 or above and reducing by five percentage points the number of students performing at or below the lowest level (Level 1);
- *Post-primary level*: In OECD's PISA assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing the number of 15-year-old students performing at Level 4 by at least five percentage points and reduce by 50% the number of students performing at the lowest level (Level 1).

The strategy provides a detailed explanation why raising children's literacy and numeracy skills matters, and how it connects with wider social goals, as well as evidence on where Ireland stands compared to its goals. The document sets out actions to be taken, specifying the responsible body, and an indicative timeline. In companion documents, the Department of Education and Skills sets out additional measures designed to support the strategy.

Sources: Santiago, P. et al. (2016[85]), OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016, OECD Reviews of School Resources, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en; Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Co-operation Assembly and the Education Forum (2014[86]), The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, Tallinn, www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf; The Department of Education and Skill (2011[87]), *Literacy and Numeracy for*

Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, https://assets.gov.ie/24520/defd56aec10946798ab2d32a42dc0d86.pdf.

To ensure coherence across the goals formulated for the different policy areas covered by the *Gesamtvision*, they should be aligned with the overarching vision for the education system and a narrative that explains their selection. Several OECD countries, including Wales and New Zealand, have found the implementation of a new curriculum to provide a powerful narrative that helped to explain how the strategic goals formulated across different policy areas fit together and contributed to a single, broader goal. The implementation of the German-speaking Community's revised core curricula will be an important objective for the education system over the coming years. Its success will require a whole-of-system approach and synergies across a number of policy areas, including, but not limited to, teachers' professional learning, school leadership and the evaluation system (see Chapter 4). Bringing about the conditions that will need to be in place to implement a new curriculum successfully is therefore one example of a narrative that could help to link the Community's high-level objectives and the specific goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. It is also one that speaks to teachers as the professionals whose work will be at heart of implementing the revised core curricula, while at the same time remaining child-centred, since the ultimate goal of the curriculum reform is to improve students' outcomes. At the same time, the revised core curricula could be designed to reflect the Community's educational vision – once it has been formulated – and constitute an effective means to carry them into schools and classrooms (OECD, 2020[88]). As described further below, the development of the *Gesamtvision* and the revision of the core curricula should therefore be closely aligned.

Link the goals to specific policy actions and turn the Gesamtvision into a implementation strategy based on meaningful stakeholder engagement

In addition to an overarching vision for the education system and specific goals for key areas, education strategies developed by OECD countries often include a set of specific policy actions intended to realise the goals formulated for each of the key areas. To make the *Gesamtvision* actionable, it should therefore involve a review of the identified challenges and goals for key policy areas and associate them with specific policy actions that will be taken to address them. The description of policy actions should include a causal narrative explaining how specific measures are expected to contribute to realising the associated goals. Taking a comprehensive approach means that the Gesamtvision should include references to: (1) existing policies and assess whether they require evaluation or updating, (2) policies that are in the planning stage or currently being implemented, and (3) new policy actions that would need to be developed.

A number of reforms in the German-speaking Community are already underway that might benefit from a stronger alignment with the *Gesamtvision* and that could benefit from an adjustment of their timelines. First and foremost, this concerns the development and implementation of the revised core curricula, which should be seen an important opportunity to bring the aspirations formulated in the overall vision to life and into the classroom. It will therefore be important for the revised core curricula to reflect the overarching vision for the education system formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. This would also provide time to involve the teaching profession more closely in the revision process, which will be important to ensure their buy-in and sense of ownership over the core curricula. Likewise, the ongoing revision of teacher competency frameworks (discussed in Chapter 4), should be aligned with the competencies that teachers will need in order to implement the new curriculum and other policy actions formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Allowing more time for the development of the teacher competency framework would also provide an opportunity to involve the teaching profession more closely in their development and consider expanding them into a differentiated set of teacher standards applicable to teachers at different stages of their careers (see Chapter 4).

The German-speaking Community is planning to follow up on the development of the *Gesamtvision* with the creation of a Master Plan in 2023, which will lay out an implementation strategy for future reforms. The Master Plan should aim to operationalise the overall vision's goals and link them to measurable indicators to track progress towards their attainment. An effective implementation strategy may also include a description of follow-up actions and mechanisms to adjust policies if the progress is inadequate. To facilitate this process, intermediate milestones should be formulated that allow the Community to monitor whether adequate progress towards the targets is being made. Including a clear causal narrative in the *Gesamtvision* that explains how each of the proposed policy actions is envisaged to attaining the associated goals will make it easier to identify problems and take remedial actions in case intermediate milestones fail to be met. In addition, diagnostic indicators can provide further information to policy makers on why expectations are not being met. (For example, a target for students' labour market outcomes and associated policy actions related to career guidance might be linked to diagnostic indicators from existing youth surveys to provide insights into the reasons why students might continue to face obstacles transitioning into the labour market). Supplementing the Master Plan with effective indicators will require the Community to develop a corresponding strategy for data collection (see below).

Iceland's experience of developing its *Education Policy 2030* strategy also showed the importance of making roles and the division of responsibilities during the development of a strategic vision transparent and to develop a clear communication strategy to accompany the process (OECD, 2021, pp. 4, 42[66]). Another aspect that will be critical for the successful development of the *Gesamtvision* and the Master Plan is the purposeful involvement of stakeholders (OECD, 2020[89])f. The German-speaking Community has already involved a wide range of relevant stakeholders during the first two diagnostic phases informing the *Gesamtvision* and it should continue doing so throughout the development and the implementation of its vision. Effective stakeholder engagement can take a range of formats but requires careful preparation and should involve a reflection on what constitutes "high-quality" engagement. Developing standards, even if they are high-level or informal, for the engagement of stakeholders during the *Gesamtvision* process could help to enrich discussions and further strengthen the policy implementation culture in the German-speaking Community more widely (OECD, 2021[66]). Innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement taken by other OECD countries, such as Finland's Education Experimentation Lab described in Box 2.5, can offer inspiration and opportunities for mutual learning.

Box 2.5. The Finnish Education Experimentation Lab

Finnish schools and education government explore complexity together

In 2018, the Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) has launched the first iteration of its The Experimentation Lab, a year-long facilitated process to support teachers, school leaders and local education administrators to engage and work with one another in new ways to experiment and co-create local policy solutions to address challenges in education. The Lab's creation responded to a need to find a way to create the open, dynamic and strategic governance systems necessary for governing complex systems by developing a vehicle for improving interaction among diverse stakeholders and building feedback loops between national level steering and local level implementation. In its first iteration, the Lab recruited participants to form 12 teams to work on a wide range of local challenges, from developing approaches to foster students' well-being or social emotional skills, to teaching digital capabilities through playful adventures, to leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) to increase students' physical activity. The Lab had two main goals:

- Build capacity (skills, competencies, mind-sets) among teachers and school leaders to develop teaching and learning through experimenting, trialling and co-creating solutions at the local level.
- Explore, test and develop new approaches to enhance interaction, dialogue, and shared understanding between national level steering and local level implementation to better respond to the complexity of challenges in education.

The model for the Lab was developed with Demos Helsinki, a Nordic think tank, with prior experience in using experiments to inform national governance. It drew on a network of government innovation and experimentation organisations in Finland to provide benchmarking and peer support. The Lab evaluated the experiments using an approach developed with researchers from the Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT) and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. This initiative shows a way government can facilitate new forms of interaction and engagement among stakeholders and leverage bottom-up approaches and experimentation to support policy making. The Lab also helped Finland to create new ways for information to circulate within the education system and to shape how policy actors build on and share practices to drive system change.

Sources: OECD (2021[66]), "Iceland Education Policy 2030 and its implementation", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 32, https://doi.org/10.1787/6e9d2811-en; OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (2020[90]), *The Experimentation Lab – Finnish schools and education government exploring complexity together*, https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/experimentation-lab/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Finally, turning the *Gesamtvision* into an actionable implementation strategy will require the German-speaking Community to align specific policy actions with the resources needed to implement them. This should involve associating them with a budget, but also other forms of resources, such as institutional structures and capacity, staffing and incentives (Viennet and Pont, 2017[84]). The implementation strategy should also plan sufficient time for policies to be fully implemented and to start generating results (OECD, 2020[89]).

Align the revision of the core curricula with the development of the Gesamtvision and use it as a lever to implement the overall vision at the classroom level

As described above, the revision of the core curricula can be an important lever to advance the overall vision for the German-speaking Community's education system. To fulfil this role, the timeline for the revision of the core curricula should be adjusted to permit their alignment with the overarching vision

formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Many of the policy options identified in this report would facilitate the implementation of the revised core curricula and vice versa. An emphasis on differentiated teaching and student guidance in the curricula, for example, could promote equity and facilitate inclusive education (see Chapter 3). In turn, a reform of teachers' working conditions and their professional learning as well as efforts to strengthen pedagogical leadership would help to create the collaborative environment in schools in which competency-based curricula can come to fruition (see Chapter 4). The revision and implementation of the core curricula is therefore intricately connected with the success of the overall vision and should be pursued in tandem to create synergies between them.

To ensure the successful implementation of the new curricula, it will also be critical that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are closely involved in their revision in order to build their ownership over the new core curricula (OECD, 2019[91]). As described in Chapter 1, teachers' involvement in the revision of core curricula is currently limited. A first draft each curriculum is developed by ministerial staff with the help of external experts and submitted for revisions to a working group comprised of only two teachers per school network (MDG, 2022[5]). Although school leaders are invited to comment on the revisions and asked to solicit feedback from their teachers, this involvement of teachers occurs late in the process and it is not clear how teacher's meaningful involvement in all schools will be guaranteed. (At the time of the OECD review, few of the interviewed teachers were aware of the curricula's revision process).

In recent years, several OECD countries, including Estonia, Finland, Japan, Norway, and Wales (United Kingdom) have reviewed and revised their curricula (OECD, 2020[88]). The most successful examples of such reforms did not consider the revision process as a technical task for specialists, but as a collaborative "bottom-up" process based on broad stakeholder involvement (Gouëdard et al., 2020[92]). The German-speaking Community should therefore, at a minimum, seek to create widespread awareness of the curricula's revision (and its purpose) and ensure that the feedback solicited from school leaders through the "impulse group" is based on a systematic consultation of teachers in all schools. The recent experience of Finland has also shown that a clear and widely accepted overarching vision and system-level goals provide an important basis for the development of new curricula since they can guide the actors involved in the curriculum reform and help them find a consensus (Lavonen, 2020[93]). This is another reason why the German-speaking Community's overall vision should be a key reference point during the curriculum reform. (More detailed country examples of curriculum reforms are presented in Box 4.2 of Chapter 4).

Further strengthen the system's data management infrastructure and align the strategy for data collection with the Gesamtvision and Master Plan

The German-speaking Community should strengthen its data infrastructure and information management system to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools and to promote evidence-based decision making at all levels of the system, from parents and schools to the central administration. In comparison to other OECD countries, the German-speaking Community suffers from limitations to both the availability of data (including comparative benchmarks with other Communities and countries) and the capacity to manage and analyse it. To address these shortcomings, the ministry should develop a central education database covering all schools, teachers and students that would allow the Community to monitor key school characteristics (related to their student body, resources, staffing and performance) as well as students' educational trajectories.

While a range of standardised tests provide the Community with valuable information on students' performance, international comparative evidence is limited to the secondary level. Furthermore, cross-sectional surveys alone do not permit the Community to monitor important sources of potential inequity, arising e.g. from students' transitions across school levels, or to enable different actors in the system to monitor students' progress and offer targeted support in real time (Helbig and Nikolai, 2017[57]). Systematically collecting data on students' needs and the social composition of schools is also an important

precondition to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage (see below) and monitor inequities across the system (see Chapter 3).

A central information management system should be designed with multiple purposes in mind. It could help schools manage their data and make informed decisions to better support their students in collaboration with external sources of support. At the same time, it would improve transparency and strengthen schools' accountability towards education authorities, parents and other stakeholders. It could also provide a much-needed basis for authorities to identify opportunities to make better use of resources to advance educational quality and equity.

The German-speaking Community's plan to introduce a new school-level data management system ("*Schulverwaltungssoftware*") by 2025 is an important step in the right direction.[25] The system will be introduced in voluntary pilot schools in the school year 2021/22 and allow school leaders to enter a range of data pertaining to their school in a standardised format. The goal of the system is to support school leaders in their decisions and planning (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021, p. 80[2]). The system should be designed with the input of school leaders to make it easier for both school leaders and the ministry to access relevant data in a comparable format, monitor students' achievement (and provide targeted support where needed), and track students' trajectories across schools. The ministry should consider adding data aggregation, analysis and visualisation functions that support monitoring and planning purposes, for example using dashboards that provide easy access to information tailored to the needs of stakeholders at different levels of the system.

If the new data management system is widely adopted by schools, this new school-level data management system could also support the administration in evaluating its education policies and reforms more systematically. Although it is currently anticipated that schools' contribution to this database would be voluntary, the Community should exert efforts to bring all schools on board in order to ensure consistency in both the level and quality of information across school networks and collect data efficiently. A unified service code for teachers could make it easier to gather comparable data on staff across networks (see Chapter 4).

Over the past few decades, several OECD countries, including Estonia and New Zealand, have developed powerful data infrastructures to monitor school-level data, which could offer relevant case studies and sources of inspiration for the German-speaking Community. In New Zealand, schools continuously collect data on their progress (including results in achievement tests such as the voluntary Electronic Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning [e-asTTle]) for their reports to their school boards. The national Ministry of Education has created *Education Counts*, an online platform where the public can access information on each school, including the composition of its student body, gender distribution, prior participation in early childhood education and the number of expulsions and repeaters. However, data on results in voluntary achievement tests or grades are explicitly not shown (Nusche et al., 2015[29]; Dabisch, Hartong and Nikolai, 2021[94]). A similar approach could help the German-speaking Community to foster transparency and encourage improvements without undermining weaker schools.

Estonia has successfully established a comprehensive integrated online information system that brings together data on schools, students, teachers, exams and qualifications and which is used by all stakeholders in the system to inform decision-making processes and systematically and transparently track progress on education priorities (see Box 2.6). The country's experience also highlights the importance of involving schools in the data collection process from the start and supporting them in using the data for school improvement purposes (Gouëdard, 2021[56]).

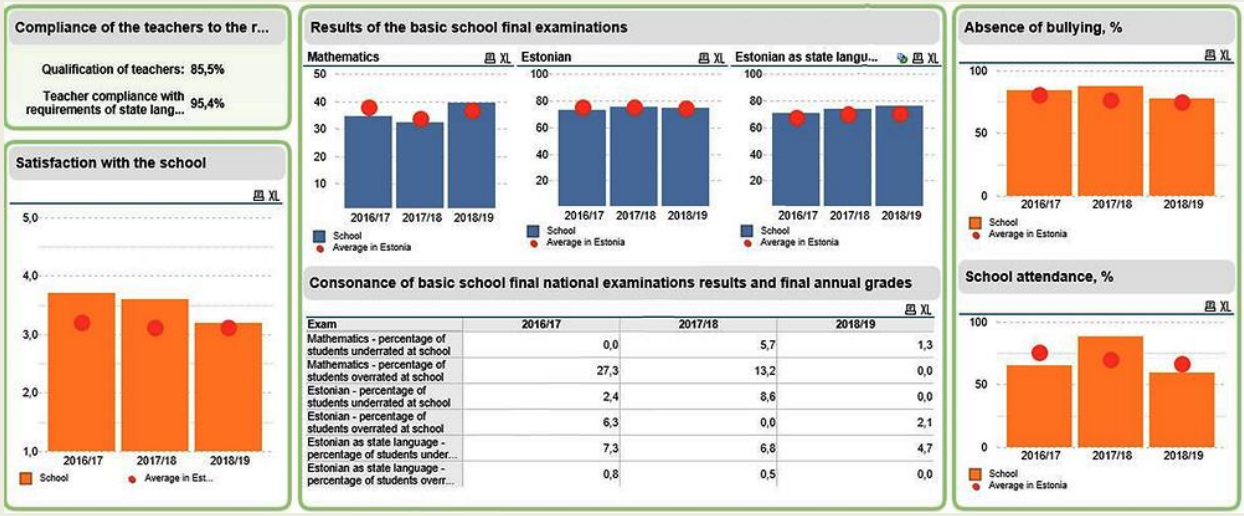
Box 2.6. The Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)

The Estonian Education Information System (*Eesti hariduse infosüsteem*, EHIS) has been rolled out in 2005 and covers about 600 data fields. By law, all schools are required to enter data into EHIS and keep it up to date. The information is individual-based, which means that each student and teacher is registered with an individual identification number. EHIS collects information on students' grades as well as their performance, state exam results or need for special support. All teachers are registered in EHIS with an identification number, and the system collects information about their qualifications, teaching hours and which grades they teach.

A central role of EHIS is to facilitate evidence-based policy making. Interviewees explained that EHIS data are the basis for all educational policy decisions, with financing, quality control and monitoring processes all relying on EHIS data. Schools can use the EHIS interface to receive information on individual students and teachers and compare themselves with other schools. The public can use the system to compare schools based on a "school card" (*Koolikaart*) (see Figure below), which contains information on the type of school, the number of students, the language of instruction, the level of student satisfaction and average student performance.

The EHIS system is complemented by a range of online tools covering early childhood education (*ELIIS* for kindergartens and pre-schools), primary and secondary education (*eKool/eschool*, *Stuudium* and *e-koolikot/e-schoolbag*) and higher education (*DreamApply*). All schools in Estonia make use of such "e-school solutions" – some run by private providers, others by the ministry – for example to access digital learning materials or take advantage of web-based school management software. These tools and platforms can be connected to EHIS data.

Figure 2.9. Example of a school card and results (fictional) of the state exam in comparison to the average grades



Sources: Adapted from OECD (2020[95]), *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems. Lessons from Six OECD Countries*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org//sites/298d6678-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/298d6678-en#; Estonian Ministry of Education and Research; E-Estonia (2021[96]), *Estonian Education Information System*, https://e-estonia.com/solutions/education/ (accessed on 15 December 2021); OECD (2021[97]), "Enhancing data informed strategic governance in education in Estonia", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 47, https://doi.org/10.1787/11495e02-en.

In light of the German-speaking Community's limited capacity, the development of indicators and the collection of data needs to be strategic and proceed with a view to support the monitoring of progress towards the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. As part of its implementation strategy (the Master Plan), the objectives and policy actions defined in the *Gesamtvision* should be linked to measurable indicators that can be used to track the system's progress. This will enhance the credibility of the overall vision and increase transparency while at the same time lending greater coherence and purposefulness to data collections across the system. The selection of indicators for the Master Plan should go hand in hand with the development of a data collection strategy for the whole system that takes stock of the data already collected across the system. The strategy should lay out what types of data the system uses for which primary purposes (e.g. which types of performance information is best suited to guide school improvement at the individual school level [such as the results of internal and external school evaluations] and which are best suited to inform improvements at the system level [such as PISA results]). On this basis, the strategy should identify priority gap areas where further types of data, more in-depth information or comparative benchmarks will need to be collected, in close consultation with its end users.

The German-speaking Community should consider aligning its data collections with international standards and contributing to the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) data collection. This would facilitate international comparisons, enable the ministry to benchmark itself against other OECD education systems and facilitate peer-learning. The Community should also consider addressing the lack of international comparative evidence on student achievement at the primary level, for example by participating in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Based on the Community's priorities, participation in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) could strengthen the Community's data on teaching practices and inform policymakers on the challenges experienced at the frontlines of teaching.

A strategic approach to the collection and use of data in the German-speaking Community should go beyond the collection and management of quantitative data as part of a strengthened central data management system. It should also consider the capacity to record, evaluate and use data at the school level, including the tacit knowledge that teachers accumulate in their day-to-day work and innovative practices developed in schools (e.g. as part of pilot projects). Given the organisation of the German-speaking Community's schools in three separate networks, making effective use of this information generated at the school level requires additional efforts to not only systematically evaluate but also share success stories and challenges across schools and school networks to ensure mutual learning (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]).

As the German-speaking Community advances towards the realisation of its *Gesamtvision* it should consider to regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective way to track the system's progress and keep the wider public involved once clear objectives and measurable targets have been identified. Several OECD countries regularly publish such indicator-based reports, which could provide sources of inspiration for the German-speaking Community. In Germany, for example, the "*Bildung in Deutschland*" have brought together information on developments in early childhood education and care, schools, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education every two years since 2006. The report is freely accessible and accompanied by an online platform that offers additional education statistics (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020[98]). Other examples of regular systematic reporting include the "*Repères et références statistiques*" published in France (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2021[99]).

Develop a system-wide reporting framework for school funding to improve transparency over the resources available to schools and school networks

In order to increase transparency and improve its ability to evaluate the school funding system, the German-speaking Community should develop a central reporting framework to regularly collect

school-level data on revenues and expenditures across all three networks. The lack of data on the levels of funding received by each school from the Community, from municipalities (in the case of OSU schools) and private sources, is severely limiting the Community's ability to analyse the effectiveness of its resource use and detect potential mismatches between schools' level of resources and their needs.

A more systematic monitoring of differences in funding levels across schools could enable the Community to evaluate the degree to which its funding system conforms to the principle of horizontal equity (i.e. the allocation of similar levels of resources to similar types of provision) across municipalities and providers. As described above, the Community's school funding system has the potential to create horizontal inequities across school networks (due to differences in the basis used to calculate their operating funding and their differential ability to supplement it from other sources) and inequities across schools (e.g. due to their different socio-demographic profiles or their unequal capacity to seek additional funding from the Community or their local municipalities). A better empirical picture of school-level revenues would enable education authorities to identify such discrepancies and address them where needed (providing an empirical basis for decisions such as the recent adjustment of operating grants for secondary students in FSU schools). It would also create greater transparency and help to foster trust in the system. The OECD review team heard multiple stakeholders express concerns about potential inequities in the funding system, which better visibility of funding streams might allay.

Case studies from the United States have demonstrated the feasibility of collecting and reporting high-quality school-level expenditure data as well as its perceived benefits for transparency, equity, and the efficient use of resources. However, the experience has also shown the importance of training local staff and building capacity in order to ensure consistency in reporting practices across schools (OECD, 2017, pp. 210, Box 5.3[12]; Atchison et al., 2017[100]). In the German-speaking Community, data on schools' financial resources could eventually be integrated into the school-level data management system discussed above, which would enable linking information on schools' inputs and outputs. This information could be collected in alignment with the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) reporting standards and integrated into its international data collection.

Combining a system-wide reporting framework for school funding with a strengthened data management system would also help to recognise opportunities for increasing the system's efficiency and to evaluate trade-offs in the use of resources. A typical example of such resource trade-offs concerns the merits of reducing class sizes compared with investments in teachers' professional learning, higher salaries or additional time for teachers to collaborate and prepare their lessons. In other words, the trade-off between investing in *more* human resources (i.e. lower student-teacher ratios) by maintaining small classes, and investing in *better* human resources and new approaches to teaching and learning (OECD, 2017, p. 38[12]; Dolton et al., 2011[101]). Empirical evidence suggests that, in many cases, the high costs of small classes mean that its benefits are outweighed by equivalent investments in the quality of teachers and teaching (Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2005[102]; Hanushek, 2011[103]). Available data suggests that – although there are exceptions – schools in the German-speaking Community have low class sizes on average while teachers spend comparatively more time teaching than their peers in other OECD countries (see Figures 4.5 and Table 4.4 in Chapter 4). The Community should therefore collect data on class sizes and assess the scope for increasing efficiency by bringing them closer to those of benchmarking countries, for example, by introducing guidelines on minimum class sizes in Community.

Explore the introduction of equity funding to compensate for schools' and students' disadvantage

As described above, the German-speaking Community's main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for additional resource needs that may arise from factors related to the socio-economic composition of their student body. Allocating additional resources to schools that are most in need of support is an important step to promote vertical equity (i.e. allocating different levels of resources to student

groups with different needs). At the same time, it can raise the funding system's effectiveness by directing resources to where they have the biggest impact (OECD, 2017[12]). The German-speaking Community should therefore explore introducing equity funding, for example by adding weights to the student-based formula used to allocate staff resources or to the formula used to calculate the operating grants of FSU and OSU schools (an equivalent mechanism would need to be developed for GUW schools).

A considerable number of OECD countries compensate for the greater financial needs of disadvantaged schools, either by providing targeted funds outside the main funding mechanism or by providing additional funding for particular schools through the main allocation mechanisms. Many of the latter countries include weightings in their funding formula to systematically allocate additional resources to certain categories of students or schools) (OECD, 2017, p. 22[12]). Different forms of index-based equity funding are used in the Netherlands, England (United Kingdom), France, Australia, New Zealand as well as different parts of the United States, Switzerland and Canada (Morris-Lange, 2016[104]; Sendzik, 2018[105]; Dabisch, Hartong and Nikolai, 2021[94]). As described in Box 2.7, since 2008, the Flemish Community of Belgium has also been weighing schools' operating grants based on four indicators related to students' socio-economic status, two of which are collected from parents and two based on administrative data (Nusche et al., 2015, p. 55[29]). Unless equity funding is area-based and used to channel resources to a specific geographic location afflicted by concentrated or compounded socio-economic disadvantage, determining the needs of a school usually requires collecting information on its student population. Doing so requires agreed-upon, measurable criteria that can be collected reliably and in a uniform way across schools. The city of Hamburg (Germany) offers an instructive example of a school-level social index based on data from student and parent surveys, combined with structural data related to the school's location (see Box 2.7) (Groot-Wilken, Isaac and Schräpler, 2016[106]; Weishaupt, 2016[107]).

Box 2.7. Indicators used to distribute index-based equity funding

Index-based equity funding for schools in Hamburg (Germany)

In 1996, the German city state of Hamburg introduced a "social index" (*Sozialindex*) for all public schools to distribute additional staff and funding to schools. The social index is calculated using eight indicators based on which schools are assigned to one of six Levels (Level 1 indicating disadvantaged student populations and Level 6 student populations from a favourable socio-economic background):

- The proportion of students with non-German family language.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs.
- The proportion of students receiving educational assistance (the "*Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket*").
- The proportion of school leavers with general higher education entrance qualification in students' areas of residence.
- The proportion of under-15-year-olds receiving social benefits in students' area of residence.
- The proportion of eligible people receiving educational assistance in the areas in students' areas of residence.
- The proportion of 15-65-year-olds who are unemployed in students' areas of residence.
- Voter turnout in students' areas of residence.

The eight indicators are merged from different data collections and data from the last three years is collated to mitigate the effects of annual fluctuations. The social index is updated every five years.

Schools at Level 1 and 2 receive more staff to form smaller classes. Primary schools at Levels 1 and 2 receive more funding and staff for special needs education. In lower secondary schools, funding and staff are allocated on a per-student basis and schools at Levels 1 and 2 receive more funding per student than those at Levels 3-6. The lower the social index of a school, the more staff hours they receive for language support and all-day care.

The social index is also used to draw comparisons between schools in comparative assessments (e.g. the KERMIT exams, Hamburg's version of the VERA assessment) and to form comparison groups in the context of educational reporting. This serves to prevent schools with more difficult circumstances from being compared with more advantaged schools without considering the social context in which they operate.

Equity funding in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Since 2008, the operating grant provided to schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium has been adjusted to account for social differences in schools' student populations. This adjustment applies to mainstream elementary and secondary education. The weighting of the operating grant is designed to deliver additional support to schools serving disadvantaged students and their communities. In the case of elementary education, this support represented about 14% of the total operating grant in 2014 and was projected to rise to 15.5% by 2021 at the time. In the case of secondary school, the corresponding figures are 10% rising to 11% in 2020. The pre-set budget to compensate for social differences between students is distributed among schools by adjusting school operating grants based on four indicators described in Table 2.2. In elementary education, the budget for equity funding is divided equally among the four indicators (i.e. 25% of the budget per indicator). In secondary education, however, the neighbourhood indicator (student's place of residence) is allocated only 10% of the overall earmarked budget, with the other indicators weighing 30% each. The money value per student meeting a given

indicator is calculated by dividing the overall budget for the indicator by the number of students meeting the indicator, resulting in four different money values (see below).

Table 2.2. Indicators of students' socio-economic status used to calculate school operating grants in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Student characteristic	Indicator	Source of information	EUR per student (2013/14) Elementary education	EUR per student (2013/14) Secondary education
Cultural background	Educational attainment of the mother	Provided by parents	122.75	125.54
Financial capacity	Entitlement for a study grant	Flemish study grant administration	120.83	114.67
Linguistic and cultural capital	Language spoken at home other than Dutch	Provided by parents	146.69	276.47
Social capital	Student's place of residence	Flemish household administration	99.78	40.79

Sources: Schulte, Hartig and Pietsch (2014[108]), „Der Sozialindex für Hamburger Schulen" [The social index for schools in Hamburg], in *Grundlagen für eine daten- und theoriegestützte Schulentwicklung*; Reproduced from Nusche et al. (2015[29]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Flemish Community of Belgium 2015*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264247598-en; Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015[109]), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm; Examples of budget letters sent to Flemish schools.

Until now, the availability of suitable data on students' socio-economic background or needs has been a barrier for the introduction of equity funding in the German-speaking Community. The introduction of a new school-level data management system (see above) may facilitate the collection of data on schools' student populations. First, however, it will be important, to reach an agreement on the concept of inequality or disadvantage that a social index should reflect, as well as a suitable set of indicators and weightings that could be used to construct it – aiming to include as much meaningful information as possible while avoiding redundancy. The search of appropriate indicators should be an integral part of the data development strategy discussed above. Finally, mechanisms will need to be put in place to ensure that schools cannot game the system and influence results in case they are to be charged with collecting the relevant data from parents (Weishaupt, 2020[64]).

Consider simplifying funding mechanisms and reducing their administrative burden

In order to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools and central authorities and to provide greater clarity over funding streams, the German-speaking Community should consider whether there is scope for streamlining its funding mechanisms. Particularly in the OSU and FSU networks, schools receive resources through a variety of per-capita earmarked funding streams with overlapping and sometimes unclear purposes. In addition to their operating grant, they receive per-student funding intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contribution. In practice – not least since the use of the operating grant is not clearly defined – funding allocated through all three of these mechanisms can be used for similar purposes. While this gives school leaders additional flexibility in the use of these funds, it is difficult to justify the administrative burden that monitoring the use of this earmarked funding would require in theory. The Germans-speaking Community should therefore consider the advantages of distributing this funding through a single allocation mechanism.

Instead of using a separate mechanism to compensate schools for waiving parental contributions, the Community could integrate this funding into the main funding allocation mechanism for schools' operating grant through a corresponding increase in per-student quotas. Instead of monitoring the use of the grant, authorities could instead make the evaluation of schools' extra-curricular activities and the absence of

parental fees part of the regular inspections. The same principle could be extended to secondary education alongside clearer guidance on the types of activities that parents can be asked to contribute to (analogous to the rules established at the primary level) or a ceiling on parental contributions.

In interviews with the OECD review team, education stakeholders have also raised concerns about the administrative burden placed on schools due to the requirement to submit individual requests to cover expenses on school equipment, for additional contract staff (BVA), innovative projects or lunch break supervision. The Community should consider whether these is scope for integrating some of this funding into schools' regular budget for operating expenses and allowing them to manage it at their discretion (including e.g. the responsibility to decide for themselves how many and what kind of staff to hire to engage in lunch break supervision). This would free up capacity and reduce the delays that some schools reported experiencing in the approval of minor expenditures. A more needs-based approach to the allocation of staff hours or operating grants, as described above, could contribute to streamlining the funding mechanisms as it would alleviate the burden currently placed on disadvantaged schools to apply for additional resources to cover their needs.

Explore the potential for a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public school networks

For a school system of its size, the German-speaking Community's historical division into three distinct school networks creates a high level of complexity and the split of responsibilities for public primary schools across two levels of administration further complicates the picture. At the time of the review, three public primary schools were part of the GUW network under the authority of the minister while all other public primary schools were part of the OSU network and managed by their respective municipalities. The German-speaking Community should consider reforming this governance arrangement with a view to simplify the network structure and explore whether municipalities should be the exclusive provider of public primary schools.

Consolidating the authority over public primary schools in the OSU network could have a number of advantages. Across OECD countries, it is not uncommon for local authorities to be closely involved in the management or supervision of primary schools, given that most students at this level live near their schools and local authorities are thought to be in an advantageous position to identify and respond to local needs as they arise. Absolving the minister from overseeing schools at two distinct levels of education could allow a more efficient use of limited administrative capacity. In addition, creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public networks could facilitate the co-ordination between public primary schools whose structures currently exclude the GUW network's primary schools. Lastly, it would ensure that all public primary schools are funded based on the same funding mechanism (although evaluating the system's horizontal equity would require greater transparency on the extent to which different municipalities are able and willing to subsidise their schools).

Strengthen career guidance and enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training

Career guidance plays an important role in helping students to develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future and to navigate the difficult choices they face in differentiated school system. In the German-speaking Community, career guidance – especially for vocational training – is still primarily organised as an extra-curricular activity (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[26]) and although a wide range of actors offer advice, counselling is mostly provided on demand and relies on the initiative of students or their parents. By contrast, in-school career guidance in the German-speaking Community is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions (see Figure 2.8) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.13[17]). To raise the effectiveness of its career guidance system the German-speaking Community should strengthen the role of schools as a key access point for students to receive formal career guidance in a comprehensive and

systematic way. This would help to ensure that all students (especially those with learning difficulties or from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds) can obtain the guidance they need without relying on students' own motivation to seek out support. At the same time, the ministry should continue using its role in forums like the Study Group School and Economy to promote a better co-ordination among the Community's different career guidance services, for example by encouraging a clearer differentiation in terms of the age groups they target.

The German-speaking Community's core curriculum on career guidance is a laudable effort to strengthen the quality and coherence of school-based career advice. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, schools will need further support to implement these interdisciplinary curricula effectively. Effective in-school career guidance can take a range of forms, including career education in which students learn about the world of work and develop career management skills through classroom teaching and other activities such as work experience (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]). Although it is a resource-intensive intervention, research from the United States has also shown that the use of in-school career counsellors can increase students' school completion, higher education enrolment and persistence, especially among low-income and low-achieving students – with effects similar in magnitude to those of teachers (Mulhern, 2020[110]).

Early exposure to the world of work plays a key role in effective career guidance. Schools should also be encouraged to partner with external providers to offer career guidance and direct students to external support. Other countries in Europe have established specialised career guidance agencies that support teachers in organising guidance activities in schools. In Denmark, for example, youth guidance centres (*Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning*) co-operate closely with schools, companies, and public employment services, focusing on the transition from upper secondary education to tertiary education or into the labour market. The advantage of these agencies, compared to purely school-based career guidance, is that they have a clear identity, specialised staff and may be able to provide advice more objectively and with more coherence and continuity (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[41]).

Efforts to strengthen career guidance in the German-speaking Community should go hand in hand with raising the status of vocational education and training (VET). The Community's VET system benefits from strong ties with local industry and a high motivation of employers to offer opportunities for vocational training. Nevertheless, vocational education continues to be perceived as a less desirable pathway by many stakeholders. Other OECD countries have undertaken concerted efforts to better inform students about the opportunities afforded by VET, for example Denmark, which systematically involves VET students in career guidance programmes, including visits to secondary schools where they promote VET and serve as role models.

A strong dual education system has helped multiple OECD countries increase the attractiveness of their VET pathways, also among academically oriented students, which could provide opportunities for mutual learning for the German-speaking Community (Nikolai and Ebner, 2012[111]). In Berlin (Germany), for example, local businesses have been closely collaborating with the newly created integrated secondary schools to link school-based and practical training since the early 2010s (see Box 2.8). Several countries have taken a similar approach, creating the possibility for students to obtain a university entrance qualification at the same time as completing dual VET, for example in Switzerland since 1994 (*Berufsmatura*) and in Austria since 2008 (*apprenticeship with Abitur*). Beyond secondary education, the German-speaking Community's AHS offers two dual bachelor degrees in accounting and public and business administration in co-operation with the IAWM (MDG, 2022[5]). While its size imposes limitations on the number of dual degrees that the AHS can offer, the German-speaking Community should explore whether local businesses could build partnerships with higher education institutions outside the Community in order to further enhance the attractiveness of its vocational sector.

Box 2.8. Dual learning in the Berlin (Germany) school system

In 2010/11, the German city state of Berlin introduced the integrated secondary school (*Integrierte Sekundarschule*) as a second school type alongside the traditional, academically oriented *Gymnasium.* The new integrated secondary schools resulted from the merger of the former lower secondary schools (*Hauptschule*), middle secondary schools (*Realschule*) and comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschule*). The new integrated secondary schools introduce dual learning in grades 7 to 10, linking school-based learning and learning at the workplace. The dual learning is intended to give students an early orientation for a later profession and to motivate and offer students who may be struggling at school new vocational perspectives.

Each integrated secondary school has at least one business partner and local businesses support dual learning by providing work experience placements for students. Further vocational and study orientation is provided by learning locations at own school workshops, student-run companies, vocational schools and public administrations, company workshops and external company training centres. All integrated secondary schools decide autonomously which dual learning measures are offered. Participation in at least one measure is compulsory for all students at a school.

Students who are not expected to graduate from school after grade 8 due to their low performance or ambition can participate in practical learning groups during grades 9 and 10. These learning groups are run by an independent education institution and provide students with intensive social and pedagogical support on up to three days a week to ensure their regular school attendance.

Sources: Neumann et al. (2017[112]), *Zweigliedrigkeit im Deutschen Schulsystem: Potenziale und Herausforderungen in Berlin*; Bartels and Nix (2010[113]), *Duales Lernen: Handreichungen für die Praxis*, https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule-und-beruf/berufs-und-studienorientierung/duales-lernen/berliner_schule_duales_lernen_ansicht.pdf.

Another reason why vocational education – despite its many strengths – continues to have a relatively low status in the German-speaking Community may be the structure of educational pathways. The German-speaking Community's school system affords a relatively high degree of permeability and students have the possibility to switch tracks at different points throughout secondary education in theory. Nevertheless, there is little empirical insight into how many students switch tracks in practice and the early sorting of students into A and B streams risks to create a hierarchy among educational pathways and – as an unintended consequence – devalue further vocational education. As the German-speaking Community further strengthens its data management infrastructure and capacity, particular attention should be payed to monitoring students' pathway choices and identifying inequities and hurdles where they exist. In light of these results, the Community should also seek to learn from the experience of systems that have implemented more comprehensive systems and consider the advantages of having all students learn together for a longer period of time.

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Notes

[1] See the organisation chart of the Ministry https://ostbelgienlive.be/DownloadCount.aspx?raid=189695&docid=52808&rn=f8553429-b606-4735-92ee-aec32060a497 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[2] Unless otherwise noted, references are to the government of the German-speaking Community, not the federal government of Belgium.

[3] All schools in the FSU network are Catholic (the only non-Catholic school in the FSU network, a Waldorf school, was closed in 2000) (Eurydice, 2010, p. 30[3]). They can be characterised as government-dependent private schools since they receive more than 50% of their funding from the state, but are privately managed (see Koinzer, Nikolai and Waldow (2017[114]) for definitions).

[4] Authors' calculations based on OECD (2021) *Education at a Glance Database*, https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=108594# (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[5] The neighbouring Belgian province of Luxembourg also provides some funding, particularly towards special education, to account for students from the province attending schools in the German-speaking Community (Eurydice, 2020[4]).

[6] The OECD data do not include expenditure on pre-primary education.

[7] In the German-speaking Community, teacher salaries as well as operating grants in OSU and FSU schools, are linked to a consumer price index, which is regularly adjusted to reflect the rising cost of living (MDG, 2022[5]).

[8] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[9] The GUW network comprises three schools with integrated pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, one stand-alone secondary school, one centre for part-time vocational education, as well as the centre for special needs pedagogy (ZFP) (MDG, 2022[5]).

[10] Bildung Ostbelgien (2021), *PPP: Schulsanierung und Schulneubau mit privaten Partnern*, https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2344/4664_read-32703/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[11] At the time of the OECD review, the only special needs school in the grant-aided sector was a primary school in the FSU network (see Table 1.2 in Chapter 1). All other special needs schools were part of the GUW network.

[12] In the school year 2020-21, 86 FTE BVA were employed in the Community's schools, an increase from 67 FTE in 2016-17.

[13] Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (2020), *Vergleichsarbeiten - VERA*, https://www.ahs-ostbelgien.be/hochschule/forschung-und-entwicklung/forschung-an-der-ahs/vergleichsarbeiten-vera/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[14] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[15] Tracking, also known as streaming or ability grouping, refers to the separation of students into different types of schools or classes, usually structured hierarchically based on students' performance.

[16] BIDA stands for "*Berufliche Integration durch Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung*". For more information, see ZAWM (2021), *BIDA*, https://www.zawm.be/projekte/bida-berufliche-integration-durch-begleitung-in-der-dualen-ausbildung/ and ZAWM (2021), *Die Anlehre, ein duales Vorbereitungsjahr*, https://www.zawm.be/fileadmin/user_upload/Bida/Praesentation_Anlehre.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[17] Going forward, the ministry is planning to offer laptops to all teachers who wish to obtain one (it is estimated that laptops will be available for all teachers in 2022), and to all secondary students, starting with those in year one and two of secondary education in Q1 2022, year 3 and 4 in Q3 2022, and the remaining years by Q3 2023.

[18] While neither of the two steering documents necessarily takes precedence over the other, the government's working programme (LAP) can be continuously revised and therefore – in contrast to the regional development concept (REK) – allows for new priorities and initiatives to be integrated as they arise.

[19] The WSR's vision statement ("*Strukturreform in der Ausbildung: Leitbild*") had not been published at the time of writing, but was received by the authors. It reflects the WSR's aspirations for a student-centred education system and emphasises equality of opportunities and supporting students in finding the educational path that is right for them.

[20] An example for such a platform is the Australian "My School" website, which publishes nationally consistent school-level information with the goal to support transparency and ensure that schools are accountable to parents and the broader community (https://www.myschool.edu.au/).

[21] Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family (2021[115]), *Schulverzeichnis [School registry]*, https://www.bildung.berlin.de/Schulverzeichnis/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[22] This equalisation mechanism was introduced by the 1958 "School Pact" and applies to "social advantages" (*Sozialvorteile*) that municipalities provide to students in OSU schools. These "social advantages" were not further defined, which created some uncertainty over the extent to which municipalities would need to compensate FSU schools. An amendment introduced in September 2021 proposes to change this.

[23] The *Dekret zur Festlegung des Betrages der Funktionssubventionen für das subventionierte Unterrichtswesen* (18. April 1994) [Decree on the determination of the operating grant for the subsidised education system] (PDG, 2015[117]) specifies that the operating grant can be used to cover – among others – the schools' "functional and equipment costs", but does not further define these terms.

[24] The figures were obtained directly from the employment agency.

[25] The project is included in the government's working programme for 2019-2024 ("*Schülerdaten und Schulverwaltung*" [Student data and school administration], LAP 2019-2024 - OB70PR26 – 67) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[2]).

3 Promoting equity and inclusion

This chapter covers equity and inclusion in the education system of the German-speaking Community of Belgium. It first describes historical developments related to equity and inclusion in the German-speaking Community, before discussing recent reforms and providing descriptive information on the Community's diverse student population. The chapter focuses on newcomer students, students with special education needs (SEN) and gifted students. An analysis of the system's strengths and weaknesses is followed by several policy recommendations designed to foster equity and inclusion in the education system.

Context and main features

Historical developments in the German-speaking Community of Belgium related to educational equity and inclusion

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the development of special schools started in the 1960s and enabled children and adolescents (aged 3 to 21 years) with special education needs to attend school. At the end of the 1980s, some students with SEN started to be integrated into mainstream schools and, by the 1990s, several working groups were set up to determine the conditions and legal requirements for fully integrating children with special education needs into mainstream education (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). At the beginning of this integration process, children were enrolled both in special and mainstream schools and the hours of support they received were calculated for both schools. This double enrolment system was abolished in the beginning of the 2000s. Today, children are only enrolled in the mainstream school they attend and the number of children with SEN pursuing an integration project has risen significantly since then (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]).

The integration of students with SEN in the German-speaking Community is governed by the Decree on Special Education Needs (*Förderdekret*),[1] which was passed on 11 May 2009 with the aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning for students with SEN in mainstream and special schools (UNIA, 2019[2]). In 2009, the Community also merged its special schools and formed the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy *(Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP*)*, which has the mission to accompany mainstream schools in their work towards more inclusive education settings. These efforts were strengthened in 2011, when a competency centre was developed to give concrete expression to the ZFP's role in supporting and advising mainstream schools. A further development occurred in 2014, when the system's psycho-medical social centres (PMS), the school health centres and the child and family services were merged into a single structure, Kaleido Ostbelgien. More information on the current support system for students with SEN is discussed in the strengths section of this chapter.

An important feature of the German-speaking Community's approach to special education needs is that it no longer allows for the classification of students by types of disorders, disabilities or impairments. Instead, the system focuses on each students' pedagogical needs, as determined through observations and pedagogical assumptions. This means that special education needs are not identified based on specific disorders, disabilities or impairments *per se*, but based on the educational needs that arise from them. More information on the definition of special education needs in the German-speaking Community of Belgium is presented in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1. Defining special education needs in the German-speaking Community of Belgium

The international definition

Special Education Needs – or SEN – is a term used across various OECD education systems to characterise the educational requirements of students with any of a wide range of physical disabilities, medical conditions, intellectual difficulties, or emotional or behavioural problems. When discussing students with SEN, the OECD Strength through Diversity Project, refers in particular to students with learning disabilities, physical impairments and/or who suffer from mental disorders (Cerna et al., 2021[3]).

How does it differ in the German-speaking Community of Belgium?

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, special education needs are not defined based on disorders, disabilities or impairments *per se*, but based on the educational needs that arise from them. In the Community, "*sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf*" (special education needs) exist when a need for support cannot be met by means of general education. This is the case when the extent of a child's or young person's impairment is such that intensive measures for developmental and educational support become necessary and the nature of the impairment requires the support of teachers, therapists and other professionals with appropriate specialist training.

In practical terms, this means, for instance, that Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is not considered a special education need *per se*; yet, if ADHD causes significant difficulties to a student, the Community may identify the student as having a special education need. Conversely, in a situation in which having ADHD does not cause educational difficulties to the student, they would not be diagnosed with a special education need. This applies to all mental disorders, learning disabilities and physical impairments which may or may not be the source of a special education need in the German-speaking Community.

Although the term "*sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf*" is thus not directly translatable with "special education needs", considering the definition of the Strength through Diversity Project and other OECD countries, a decision has been made to translate it as such for the scope of this review. Unless otherwise noted, the term "special education needs" will be used throughout this chapter according to its meaning in the German-speaking Community. This has been decided for two main reasons: first, to align the terminology of the Community to the international literature in the field; second, to avoid creating a new term that would populate an already complex field that often uses different terms interchangeably (see (Mezzanotte, 2020[4]) on the use of "learning disabilities", "difficulties" and "disorders").

Source: Cerna et al. (2021[3]), "Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework", *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 260, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/94ab68c6-en.

Each special school in the German-speaking Community must be able to support all types of disability and educational needs. This means that schools are supposed to help all students, regardless of their specific characteristics, with the support of the Community's agencies and specialised institutions. Overall, the current objective of the system is to keep students with SEN in mainstream education using a strategy of educational adaptation rather than full inclusion (UNIA, 2019[2]). Specialised education is thus not meant to fully disappear, but to manage, direct and implement the process of inclusion of students into mainstream education. Since the *Förderdekret 2009* came into force, special schools must also share a campus or building with a mainstream school, as is the case with the "inclusive campuses" in Eupen, Bütgenbach and St. Vith.

Recent reforms and policies related to equity and inclusion

As described in the preceding section, the German-speaking Community has undertaken legislative efforts to promote greater equity and inclusion in its education system. Although the *Förderdekret* of 2009 has been the most prominent milestone in updating regulations related to students with SEN (MDG, 2022[5]), the project "Future of special needs education in mainstream schools" has also contributed to creating a more equitable and inclusive school system by developing principles for SEN education to be implemented in all mainstream schools (MDG, 2022[5]).

The Community's regional development concept III (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK III), which provides the framework for the current legislative period, stipulates the goal of improving the quality of education and training and expanding the diversity of non-formal education opportunities by 2025 (MDG, 2022[5]). In addition to students with SEN, one focus of the REK III is the integration of people with an immigrant background through education. The project "Integration in Education" aims to promote educational equity by empowering people of all ages with an immigration background as well as newcomer students to participate in society through education, including basic, vocational and adult education. The project also aims to strengthen teachers' competency in dealing with diversity (MDG, 2022[5]).

Moreover, students with an immigrant background as well as their native peers are supported through the project "Promoting Language Education and Multilingualism". The project aims to improve students' foreign language skills in French, German, Dutch and English and to further strengthen continuous language education, especially in relation to German as a language of instruction.

Who are diverse students in the German-speaking Community of Belgium and how are they supported?

The concept of diversity refers to people's differences, which may relate to their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status (UNESCO, 2017[6]). More specifically, diversity refers to cohabiting people who perceive themselves or are perceived to be different and form a range of different groups. The concept of diversity is multidimensional. It might relate to physical aspects or immaterial ones, such as cultural practices, and it makes sense according to the boundaries defined by groups of individuals (Cerna et al., 2021[3]). In the context of the OECD review, the analysis of diversity in the German-speaking Community's education system has focused particularly on students with special education needs, students with an immigrant background and gifted students.

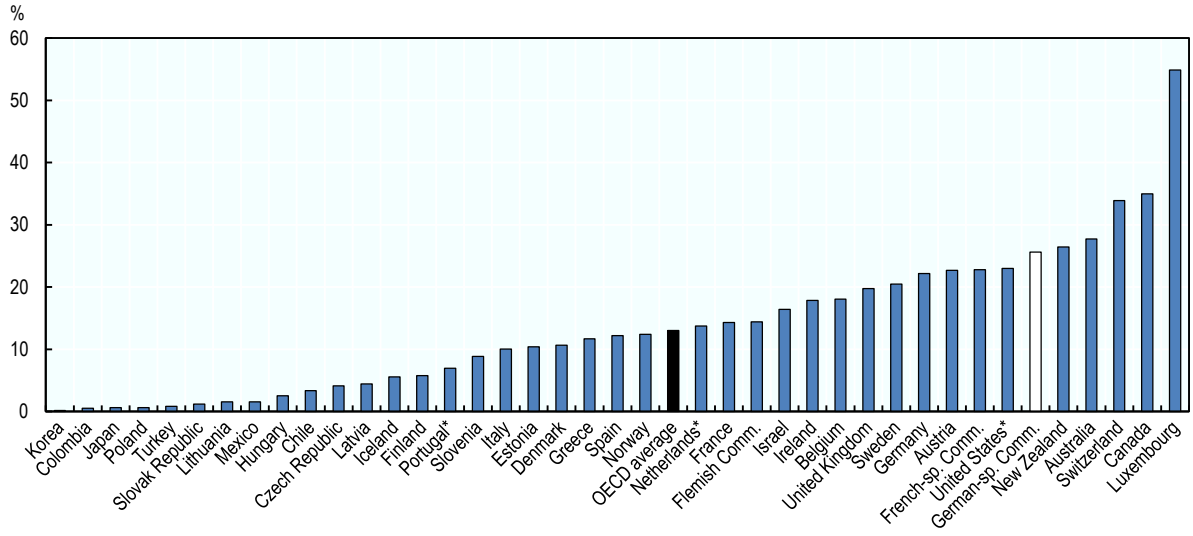
Immigration and students with an immigrant background

The German-speaking Community has a significant immigrant population and a large French-speaking linguistic minority. In 2020, 16 584 of the Community's 77 949 inhabitants were foreigners, 14 143 of whom lived in the canton of Eupen and 2 441 in the canton of St. Vith (Das Statistikportal - Ostbelgien (Statistical Portal German-speaking Community of Belgium), 2020[7]). The majority of these foreign nationals are German. Furthermore, 13 559 of the 61 365 Belgians living in the German-speaking Community have foreign roots. This means that they either have at least one parent who had a foreign nationality when they first registered or had a foreign nationality themselves when they first registered. Many of these 13 559 inhabitants have a connection to a neighbouring country (7 025), but mostly only through one parent. Another 5 027 Belgians have roots in a country outside the EU, most of whom were first registered with a foreign nationality before becoming Belgian (Das Statistikportal - Ostbelgien (Statistical Portal German-speaking Community of Belgium), 2020[7]). Thus, 30 143 inhabitants of the German-speaking Community (37.7% of the total population) have foreign roots or connections: 16 584 based on their foreign nationality and 13 559 based on the first registered nationality of their parents or themselves (Das Statistikportal - Ostbelgien (Statistical Portal German-speaking Community of Belgium), 2020[7]).

Data from the 2018 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that 25.6% of 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community had an immigrant background (Figure 3.1), which was above the OECD average of 13%. Among them, about 56% reported to speak mainly a language other than German at home (OECD, 2019[8]). In contrast to other OECD countries, 33% of non-immigrant students also spoke another language at home, many of whom belong to the Community's French-speaking minority (OECD, 2019, p. Table II.B2.73[8]). The percentage of immigrant students in the German-speaking Community is also higher than in the rest of Belgium.[2]

Figure 3.1. Percentage of immigrant students, 2018

15-year-old students

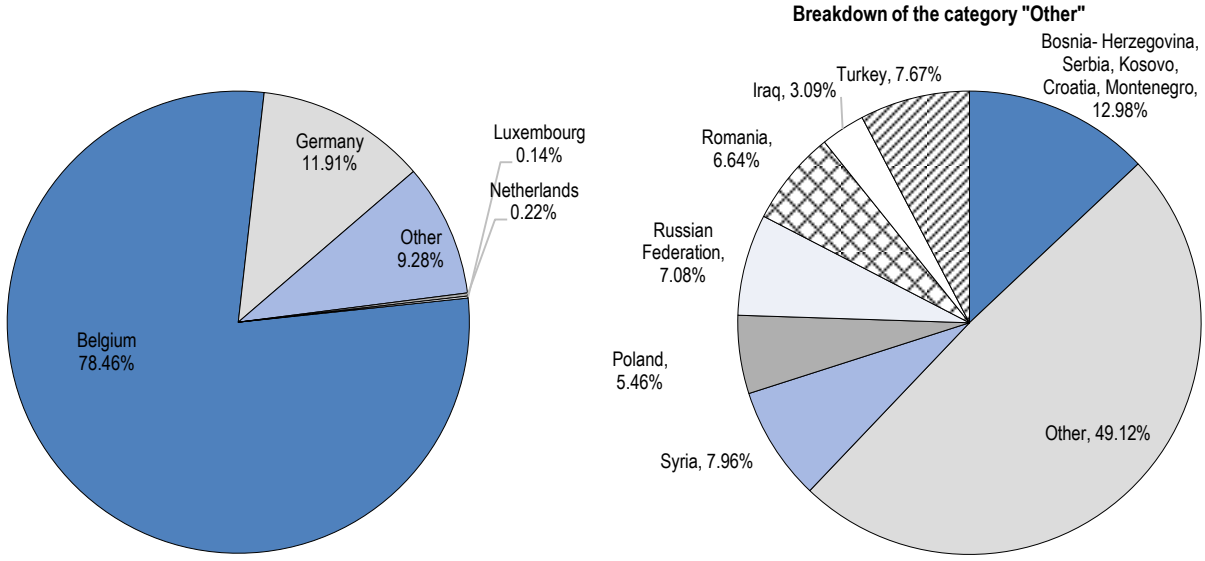


* Netherlands, Portugal and United States: Data did not meet the PISA technical standards but were accepted as largely comparable.
Source: OECD (2019[8]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en, Tables II.B2.72 and II.B1.9.1.

StatLink https://stat.link/msoz6u

National data show that 78% of pre-primary and primary students in the German-speaking Community hold the Belgian nationality. The majority of students with an immigrant background (12%) come from Germany (see Figure 3.2). Other European common nationalities among students with an immigrant background include the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania and, to a smaller extent, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia and Montenegro. The most common non-European nationalities among students with an immigrant background are those of Syria, the Russian Federation, Iraq and Turkey.

Figure 3.2.Nationality of pre-primary and primary school students

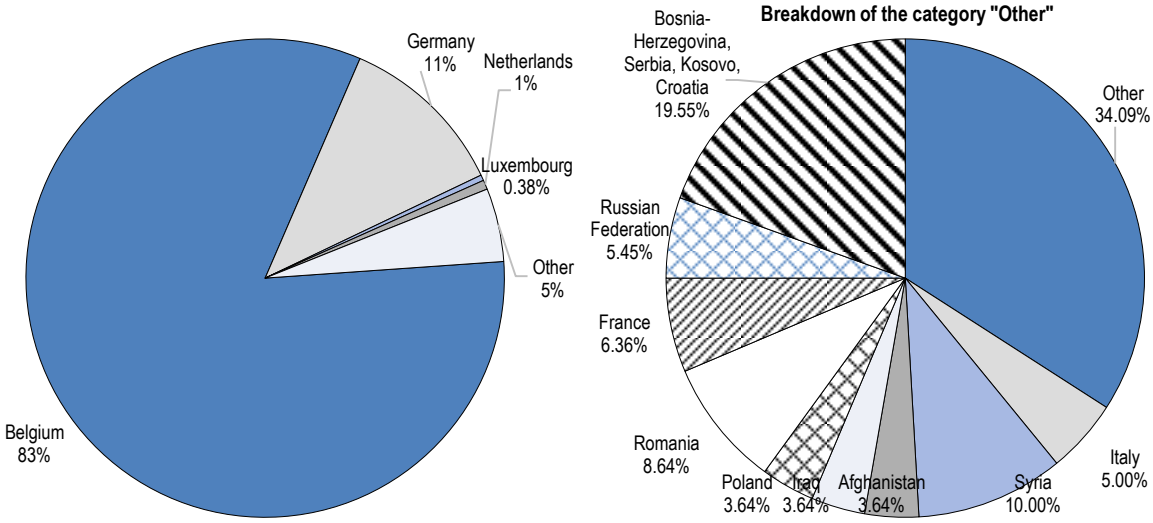


Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/6jpbl7

The composition of students' nationalities is similar at the secondary level (see Figure 3.3). As in pre-primary and primary schools, most secondary students with an immigrant background are from Germany, but there is a slightly larger percentage of students from Italy and France, each of which represent about 0.3% of the overall secondary student population (MDG, 2021[9]).

Figure 3.3. Nationality of mainstream secondary school students



Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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Among the students with an immigrant background, one of the most vulnerable categories are generally newly arrived or "newcomer" students. The challenges that these students face in the education system depend on their experience of migration, but also on the age at which they immigrated. Children who migrated at an early age often share a life history that is more similar to that of second-generation immigrant students than to that of other first-generation students. By contrast, students who migrated at an older age often face greater barriers when adapting to a new education system and to ways of being and behaving that differ from those in their country of origin (OECD, 2018[10]). Data from the German-speaking Community show that the number of newcomer students in pre-primary and primary schools has increased between 2017 and 2020, and that most students in these groups are in pre-primary education. As shown in Table 3.1, the majority of newcomer students (91% in 2020) attend schools in the northern part of the Community.

Table 3.1. Newcomer students in primary schools, 2017-2020

Year		North	South	Total
2020	Pre-primary	259	15	274
	Primary	40	14	54
	Total	**299**	**29**	**328**
2019	Pre-primary	198	33	231
	Primary	25	16	41
	Total	**223**	**49**	**272**
2018	Pre-primary	194	5	199
	Primary	36	20	56
	Total	**230**	**25**	**255**
2017	Pre-primary	188	9	197
	Primary	37	13	50
	Total	**225**	**22**	**247**

Note: The dates of reference are in late September of each year (30.09.2020, 30.09.2019, 28.09.2018, 29.09.2017).
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

The number of newcomer students enrolled in secondary schools of the German-speaking Community is much lower than that of students in pre-primary and primary schools (see Table 3.2). In the academic year 2020/21, only 32 newcomer students were enrolled in mainstream secondary education. There were 27 newcomer students in 2019/20 and 35 in 2018/19 (MDG, 2021[9]).

Table 3.2. Newcomer students in secondary schools, 2017-2020

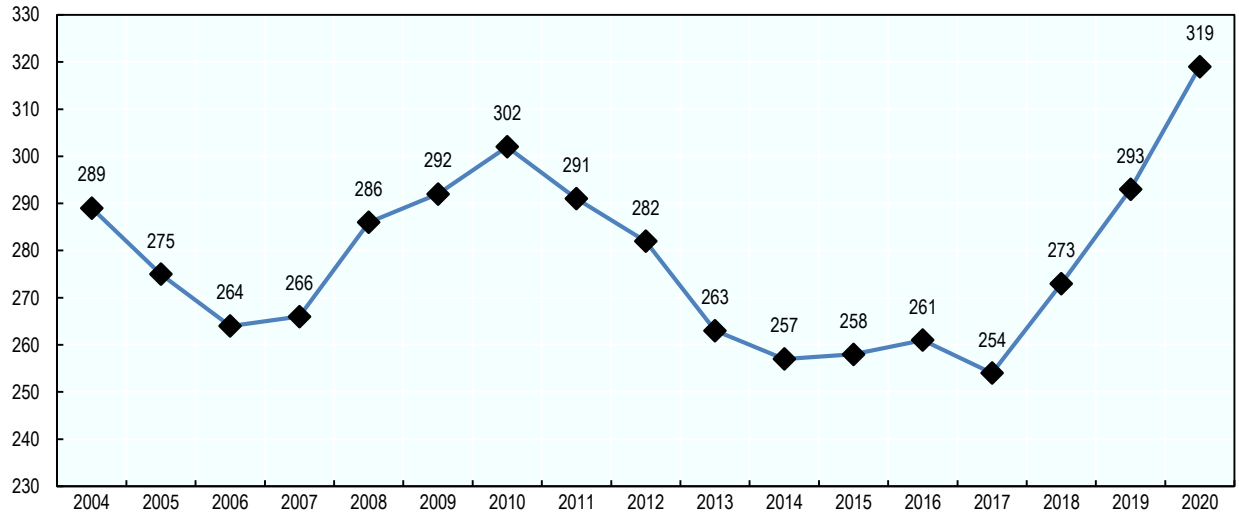
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Robert Schuman Institute	19	12	23	25
Pater Damian Special School	9	8	5	17
St. Vith Episcopal School	4	7	7	13
TOTAL	**32**	**27**	**35**	**55**

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Students with special education needs

In the school year 2020/21, about 2.6% of students of the German-speaking Community of Belgium attended a special school, while 3.19% received high-threshold support in mainstream schools (MDG, 2022[5]). Data from the Community show that the number of students in special schools has decreased until 2017/18 and started increasing after that (see Figure 3.4). The OECD review team was told that this increase was primarily driven by factors. First, the Community has seen a change in students' profiles and in particular a rising number of students with specific socio-emotional difficulties, disabilities or other medical issues. Second, the number of students with SEN studying abroad has decreased. Until recently, many students with specific SEN – in particular those with visual or hearing impairments – had been commuting to North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), where special education provisions could be better guaranteed. In recent years, a greater number of students with visual and hearing impairments have been accommodated in local schools while receiving support from teachers of specialised schools in Aachen (Germany).

Figure 3.4. Trend in the number of students in special schools in the German-speaking Community, 2004-2020



Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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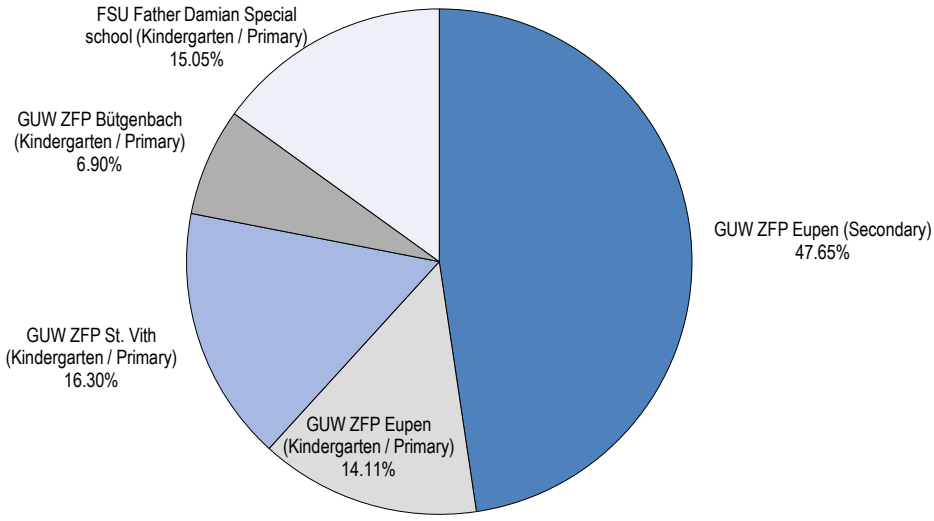
As mentioned above, about 2.6% of students in the German-speaking Community attend a special school. The Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP) has three branches where students aged 3 to 14 receive individual support:

- The branch in **Eupen** teaches students in six support and learning groups. The learning groups consist of four to eight students.
- The branch in **Bütgenbach** is organised as an inclusion-oriented school, jointly with a local primary school (see Box 3.3). The classes include both students with special education needs and their peers. Pre-primary children from age 3 to 5 are supported in mixed groups. The classes of the primary school are organised in levels (Level 1: 1st and 2nd grade, Level 2: 3rd and 4th grade; Level: 5th and 6th Grade). The learning groups are team-taught and consist of 20 to 25 students, of which four to five may be students with SEN. The learning groups can be supported by therapeutic specialists if necessary. A “rainbow class” serves children with multiple disabilities or autism, who can be integrated into regular classes on an hour-by-hour basis.
- The **St. Vith** branch is not organised by grade, but in four mixed-age groups, inspired by Edwin Achermann’s principles of mixed-age learning. The groups consist of five to twelve children who are looked after by up to four teachers and educators (Zentrum für Förderpädagogik, 2021[11]).

In the Pater Damian special school, which is part of the Free Subsidised Education System (FSU), teaching takes place in three age groups consisting of a maximum of eight students. The age groups are supported in their learning by speech therapists, kinesiotherapists and occupational therapists (PDS, 2021[12]).

In 2020, most students with special education needs at the pre-primary and primary level were supported by the ZFP St. Vith (16.3%), followed by the FSU Pater Damian (15%), ZFP Eupen (14.1%) and ZFP Bütgenbach (6.9%). In addition to the ZFP’s three branches at the primary level, the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy also includes a secondary school in Eupen where students with different learning needs are individually supported in learning groups (Zentrum für Förderpädagogik, 2021[11]). 47.7% of students with special education needs attended the ZFP’s special secondary school in Eupen (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5. Distribution of students with special education needs among different schools, 2020



Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021[9]), *Schülerzahlen 2020-2021*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/ResourceImage.aspx?raid=184166 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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Although, based on the legislative framework discussed above, the German-speaking Community does not categorise students with special education needs based on types of disorders, disabilities or impairments, the Community does recognise five broad areas of special education needs. Each area is associated with a set of support measures that students can receive and which are described in more detail further below. The five areas of needs are as follows:

- **Learning disabilities** (Teilleistungsstörungen): Disorders such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, etc. While the term literally translates to "partial performance disorders", it has been decided in this report to translate it as learning disabilities to align it to international literature and practice that uses either learning disabilities or difficulties.
- **Intellectual disabilities** (Lernbeeinträchtigung): General problems related to weak cognitive performance, such as learning deficits in multiple areas, low intelligence quotient (IQ) between 70 and 85, etc.
- **Developmental delays** (Entwicklungsverzögerung): Multiple disabilities, such as complex medical conditions, that can range from spinabifida, hemiparesis, to autism spectrum disorders.
- **Socio-emotional issues**: Including attachment disorders, behavioural problems, trauma, etc.
- **Medical issues**: Children who have specific medical conditions, such as epilepsy, heart disorders, genetic diseases, etc.

Some conditions may be included in more than one category. ADHD, for instance, could either be considered a learning disability or a socio-emotional disorder, depending on the severity of the condition. Rather than serving as a prescriptive structure, the typology is meant to serve as a reference framework with the goal to help identify every child's needs and provide them with the necessary support, regardless of their specific condition.

Gifted students

In recent years, supporting gifted students (*Begabtenförderung*) has become a focus for policy makers in the German-speaking Community (MDG, 2018[13]). In the Community, "gifted", "highly gifted", "highly intelligent" or "particularly capable and talented" students are understood to include children and adolescents who are distinguished from their peers due to their early development, above-average abilities, their interests and achievement (MDG, 2021[14]). (Highly) gifted students are understood to be those with an IQ of at least 125 and excel in several of the tested sub-areas, such as language comprehension, visual-spatial reasoning, working memory, processing speed and logical reasoning (MDG, 2018[13]).

While the general mandate to the school authorities formulated in Chapter II Section 1 of the Decree of 31 August 1998 (*Kapitel II Abschnitt 1 des Dekrets vom 31. August 1998*) requires schools to foster the talent and individual development of all students, the promotion of giftedness focuses on a specific group of learners identified as having above-average potential. The aim of this specific support is to stimulate the development of the potential of these students within the existing teaching system and to accompany them in the best possible way (MDG, 2018[13]).

To support gifted students, the German-speaking Community has introduced several measures through Article 61 of the Draft Decree on Measures in Education 2018 (*Dekretentwurf über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2018*).[3] Previously, Chapter II of the Royal Decree of 29 June 1984 on the Organisation of Secondary Education (*Kapitel II des Königlichen Erlasses vom 29. Juni 1984 über die Organisation des Sekundarschulwesens*) had impeded an accelerated progress of gifted students since it did not allow students to skip one or more years of school. The new legislation introduced the possibility for an external examination board to allow gifted students to graduate from primary education early and enrol in the first or second year of secondary education, if they are at least ten years old. The giftedness examination board can also permit gifted students to follow lessons at a secondary school prior to completing the previous education cycle or allow students to follow courses outside of school, for example at higher education institutions. These opportunities are only open to gifted students who demonstrate an IQ of at least 125, which can be based on an assessment by Kaleido or another institutions. Since schools autonomously engage in the identification and support of gifted students, there are no central data on the number of gifted students currently enrolled in the German-speaking Community's education system.

Strengths

Inclusion is seen as a priority by all stakeholders and recent and ongoing reforms are pointing in the right direction, towards a more inclusive education system

Inclusive education is becoming an important element of the system of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and different stakeholders recognise its importance for students. Indeed, the Community has built a structured support system, in particular for students with SEN and gifted students, and recognises the relevance of multilingualism and multicultural education.

There is a structured support system, especially for students with special education needs

The German-speaking Community of Belgium has developed a structured support system for students with SEN. In the academic year 2019/20, the Community provided support to 293 children and young people in special schools through individualised teaching and other support (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]). Schools' work with students with SEN is supported and co-ordinated by agencies and specialised staff:

- The Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik,* ZFP), whose specialist advisors offer a wide range of special education services in the associated Competency Centre and co-ordinate both the special needs schools and the integrative support in mainstream schools.

- Kaleido Ostbelgien, the centre for healthy development of children and adolescents, which prepares the expert opinion for special education needs and provides holistic advice and support to families.

The integration of students into mainstream schools is organised by two specialised schools: the ZFP Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy and the Pater Damian Special School (*Pater-Damian-Förderschule*). These schools manage "integration projects" throughout the German-speaking Community, which comprises about 60 regular schools (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). To accompany integration projects and support students with SEN, teachers are seconded from the special schools to mainstream schools.

The education system of the Community offers three main support measures when educating students with special education needs (MDG, 2022[5]):

1. **High-threshold support** (hochschwellige Förderung) applies to students who have special education needs identified by Kaleido4 and are carried out by integration teachers with a capital of 900 hours.5 Special education needs are diagnosed whenever a student's need for support cannot be met by general educational measures. This is the case when the extent of the impairment is such that intensive measures for developmental and educational support become necessary and the nature of the impairment requires specific measures for which teachers, therapists and care specialists with appropriate specialist training are required. High-threshold support is generally provided once Kaleido has identified a significant need for support in a student. Applications for the identification of SEN are submitted in writing to Kaleido by the parent or guardian or by leader of the mainstream school at which the student is or will be registered. If the mainstream school wishes to initiate the procedure, it must obtain the consent of the parent or guardian. The head of the mainstream school has the option of appealing to the support committee if the legal guardians do not give their consent. Once the need for high-threshold is identified by Kaleido, students can be enrolled in mainstream education and receive the aforementioned support from integration teachers, either in their mainstream school or in a special education school, depending on an evaluation from a "Support Conference" (Förderkonferenz) convened by Kaleido. The Support Conference involves various stakeholders relevant to the student's education, including parents or legal guardians, the school leader of the mainstream school, mainstream teachers, the head teacher of the special school co-operating with the mainstream school, special education teachers and paramedical or socio-psychological staff of the special school, as well as Kaleido staff.
2. **Low-threshold support** (niedrigschwellige Förderung) is intended to offer children with permanent or temporary increased support needs the best possible support in schools by strengthening the pedagogical support for teaching staff in mainstream primary schools. Students who do not meet the diagnostic criteria for high-threshold support or for attending a special school are entitled to appropriate support measures that respond to their individual needs. To this end, mainstream primary schools receive 90 quarter positions for special education teachers (Förderpädagogen) who can assist primary school teachers with differentiated instruction in their lessons (e.g. for dyslexia or dyscalculia). This support requires neither a special education need nor an assessment by Kaleido, but can be provided based on teachers' identification of students' needs. The concept of low-threshold support contains four essential elements that facilitate its professional implementation:
    - The use of special education teachers in all mainstream primary schools.
    - Structured processes in co-operative support diagnostics and integrative low-threshold support.
    - The reliance on special education advice for primary schools.
    - Accompanying supervision of all special need teachers in mainstream primary schools.

    Low-threshold support does not yet exist in secondary education.
3. **Subsidised contract staff** (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA). BVA staff are specialists made available to schools to support students whose needs are not only pedagogical. This can

include nurses, kinesiotherapists, occupational therapists, and/or behavioural psychologists. BVA hours are typically granted for one year (MDG, 2022[5]). (See Chapter 2 for more information on BVA).

The main distinction between low-threshold and high-threshold support is therefore not the type of impairment or disorder that a student has, but whether Kaleido determinates that the impairment or disorder leads to the development of a special education need for the individual student. This means that a student with a certain disorder could, in theory, receive different type of support, depending on the nature of their needs. The OECD review team has been informed, however, that Kaleido does not typically identify special education needs for students that have learning disabilities (*Teilleistungsstörungen*), which includes disorders such as dyslexia and dyscalculia. In practice, when evaluating a student with autism, for example, Kaleido could thus conclude that:

- The student does not require any special support in school.
- The student should receive a compensation for disadvantage (which is available for all students).
- The student does not have a special education need, but should receive low-threshold support, such as the help from a support teacher.
- The student has a special education need and is thus entitled to high-threshold support, such as integration lessons or other specific forms of support that require teachers, therapists and care specialists with appropriate specialist training.

The three support forms outlined above are complemented by other measures and approaches that teachers can adopt to support their students. While specific disorders or disabilities are not strictly linked to corresponding support measures, measures that may typically be taken to support students with each of the five types of disorders and/or disabilities are listed below:

- Learning disabilities (*Teilleistungsstörungen*): Consultation of the ZFP, grade protection and compensation of disadvantage, which are explained in detail below.
- Intellectual disabilities (*Lernbeeinträchtigung*): Differentiation, low-threshold support (if there is not a special education need diagnosed), or high-threshold support (if there is a special education need).
- Developmental disorders (*Entwicklungsverzögerung*): High-threshold support (if there is a special education need), support from subsidised contract staff (BVA) and therapeutic approaches.
- Socio-emotional needs: Participation in the Time-Out programme, the planned systemic institution for attachment-oriented pedagogy (*Systemische Kindereinrichtung mit bindungsorientierter Pädagogik,* SKEI) for children under 12 years in co-operation with the youth welfare (*Jugendhilfe*) and Kaleido.
- Medical issues: Support through specialist staff, supervision through medical facilities and fast-track courses (MDG, 2022[5]).

Grade protection and the compensation of disadvantage constitute two specific measures, which the German-speaking Community can provide to some students with SEN. “Grade protection” (*Notenschutz*) can be granted to student to absolve them from assessments in certain subject areas (MDG, n.d.[16]). The grade protection can apply to a sub-area of one or more subjects and can only be requested and granted for students with the following conditions:

- a sensory impairment such as visual or hearing impairment
- a perception disorder such as an auditory or visual perception disorder
- a learning disability such as a dyslexia, dysgraphia or dyscalculia
- a physical impairment or a temporary functional impairment.

Students whose severe intellectual disability is accompanied by an IQ below 85 are excluded from the grade protection since the grade protection should apply to exceptional subject areas while students with severe intellectual disabilities would need to be excluded from assessments in many areas (MDG, n.d.[16]).

The "compensation for disadvantage" (*Nachteilsausgleich*) refers to a set of pedagogical measures intended to compensate for specific deficits of students at the primary or secondary levels, which schools can grant without an assessments from Kaleido or a formal diagnosis (MDG, n.d.[17]). The compensation for disadvantage is similar to what – in other contexts – is generally referred to as "accommodations", which are support measures that concern *how* students learn, in contrast to "modifications", which rather concern *what* students learn (Mezzanotte, 2020[4]). Accommodations are intended to help students with SEN learn the same information as other students through supportive changes to their learning environment. The compensation for disadvantage does not absolve students from having to meet the competence expectations of the core curricula (and thus does not appear in the students' report cards), and can be of a technical, personal, organisational or infrastructural nature. For example, visually impaired students might be provided with worksheets in an appropriate font or size, or student with a learning disability might be given additional time to complete a test or exam.

The measures to compensate for disadvantages are considered appropriate if they:

- are adapted to students' individual needs
- encourage students' participation in activities
- ensure students' autonomy, security and dignity (MDG, 2022[5]).

School leaders determine appropriate measures to compensate for students' disadvantage and can receive guidance from external experts. Measures whose financial and/or organisational costs are disproportionate to the benefit they provide are generally considered inappropriate.

Similarly to grade protection, students are eligible to receive a compensation for disadvantage if they have:

- a sensory impairment such as visual or hearing impairment
- a perception disorder such as an auditory or visual perception disorder
- a learning disability such as dyslexia, dysgraphia or dyscalculia
- a physical impairment or a temporary functional impairment (MDG, n.d.[17]).

The use of grade protection and compensation for disadvantage in schools is still being developed and was not covered by the external evaluations' latest round of school evaluations (Cormann and Goor, 2021[18]). Further work is therefore needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures, as is the case for the inclusion of students with SEN more generally (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]).

At the beginning of the school year, every child for whom high-threshold support has been approved must receive an individual support plan (*Individueller Förderplan*, also called "Individual Education Plan" or IEP internationally) prepared by the special or mainstream school. After a pedagogical-diagnostic discussion with the student, parents and teachers, the IEP is drawn up during a Support Conference (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). The IEP includes:

- A precise description of the support goals (possibly with intermediate goals) that the child should achieve with the involvement of the parents.
- A description of the support measures to be taken (specific adaptations, differentiations, etc.) and the staff entrusted with their implementation.

The responsibility for maintaining the student file (student portfolio) lies with the head of the school the child attends (mainstream school or special school). Moreover, all staff involved in the implementation of the IEP's goals (class leaders, support teachers, subject teachers, educators, therapists, etc.) need to document their views on the learning progress of the supported child. The Support Conference needs to evaluate the extent to which the described goals have been achieved at least once during the school year and make an assessment

of whether the goals and measures need to be adapted (MDG, 2021[19]). On the basis of these evaluations, the members of the Support Conference agree on the continuation or termination of an integration project for the next school year, by 30 May of the current school year. The Support Conference can also decide to terminate an integration project during the school year.

Overall, the German-speaking Community of Belgium has a developed system of support for students with SEN. There is an emphasis on flexibility and offering tailored support to each student who requires help, regardless of their diagnosis. Measures such as the low-threshold support or the "compensation for disadvantage" offer extra support and accommodations for any student in need of extra support. Moreover, the expertise and knowledge developed in special schools is progressively being mobilised to support mainstream schools, which are now the primary education settings for most students with SEN. The quality of inclusion and individualisation of support measures is further strengthened by the fact that many classes in the German-speaking Community are small and distances are short.

Newcomer students are generally well supported in the area of language learning

The Germany-speaking Community of Belgium provides newcomer students with structured support in the area of language learning in order to ensure that they have the linguistic means to integrate academically and socially. Offers such as language learning classes pave the way to a culture of integration and inclusion, even if there are still challenges related to their implementation and expansion (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]).

Students who fulfil the following conditions at the time of their first enrolment in a school in the German-speaking Community are considered as newcomer students (e*rstankommende Schüler*, EAS) (MDG, 2019[20]):

- They are between 3 and 18 years old.
- Their competence in the language of instruction is below level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- Their place of residence or permanent residence is in one of the nine municipalities of the German-speaking Community.

The Community has developed a structured system to support newcomer students in their language acquisition, with different practices and administrative requirements for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. School leaders assess students' competence in the language of instruction at the time of enrolment, using a test that was elaborated by the school inspectorate. The test is contained in the application form that the school leader has to fill in. In primary education, the assessment of students' level of language development in speaking and listening is conducted through an interview by the school leader. The reading assessment is based on the reading of a text and answers to related questions; the assessment of students' writing is optional and based on the writing of a short text. The modalities for students in secondary education are similar, but the content of the questions is adapted to their age group. The assessment of language competence is included in the form that school leaders need to compile to enrol students in their school. The ZFP supports schools' integration of newcomer students and conducts annual language tests for all newcomer students. Once the newcomer students' level of language competency and their need for language learning support are identified, different practices are adopted across levels of education.

In pre-primary education, language acquisition takes place in the first two years using the immersion principle. According to this principle, the children should learn the language of instruction through play. For this reason, there is no budget for language courses or a language learning class at the pre-primary level. However, if more than 40% of the students in pre-primary education (or 30% in the case of bilingual pre-primary education) are enrolled as first-year students and do not speak the language of instruction at least at level A2 of the CEFR, additional hours of language support are granted. If at least 12 children are enrolled in these pre-primary language classes, schools can apply for additional staff funding (MDG, 2019[20]).

In primary school, students from the age of five (third year of pre-primary and primary school) who meet the conditions described above can either attend language learning courses or a language learning class four days

a week. Language learning classes are organised across grades and levels in mainstream schools. They only teach newcomer students aged 5 to 18 with the aim of helping them acquire the language requirements to be integrated into mainstream schools. By contrast, language learning courses are intensive courses in mainstream primary schools that enable newcomer students to meet the language requirements to be integrated into mainstream primary schools. Students who attend a language learning class do so on the fifth day of the school week on a long-term basis. A language learning class can only be organised if there are at least nine newcomer students in a school or with the same school provider, which is the number of students required for the school or provider to receive a full-time teaching position for the class. However, there are some provisions in place in case there are fewer students.

Students can attend the language learning class for a maximum of one school year or follow a language learning course. From the school year 2021/22, the length of stay can be extended by a maximum of one year in exceptional cases. Furthermore, from the school year 2021/22, additional hourly capital will be granted if a mainstream primary school educates three or more students who were enrolled as first-year students during the previous school year. Moreover, the Decree of 28 June 2021 on "Measures in the Field of Education 2021" (*Dekret vom 28. Juni 2021 über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2021*) introduced an internal school Monitoring Council in primary schools, which will decide on students' integration into the regular primary school classes and recommend a compensation for disadvantage where necessary (PDG, 2021[21]).

Sometimes newcomer students attend a language learning class in a different primary school, in which case the Community organises the transport between schools. The approved funding for this form of support is valid from the moment of the approval until 30 September of the following school year and an application can be made at any time during the school year (MDG, 2019[20]). Newcomer students do not count towards the funding of teaching staff in the primary school where they are enrolled, but they do count for the funding of the school leader, co-ordination and projects as well as the funding for pedagogical purposes and operating grants. Funds for the reduction of parental school costs are provided to the regular primary school at which the language learning classes are established.

In secondary education, three schools offer language learning classes: Two in the north of the Community (the Pater Damian Special School and the Robert Schuman Institute in Eupen) and one in the south (the St. Vith Episcopal School). These classes each receive resources for 30 hours of teaching for up to 12 newcomer students. More teaching time is granted for language classes with more than 12 newcomer students (MDG, 2019[20]). Students who have received the approval to participate in language learning classes do not count towards the regular funding of teaching staff in their school, but they do count for the funding of the school leader, for co-ordination, project posts and educators. The secondary schools in which the newcomer students are enrolled also receive funding for pedagogical purposes and the corresponding operating grants for these students.

In secondary education, students can attend the language learning class for a maximum of two school years. As in primary education, from the school year 2021/22, secondary students will be able to extend their attendance by a maximum of one year, in exceptional cases. Secondary students who completely transfer from the language learning class to the mainstream classroom continue to receive additional hourly capital for three school years so they can continue to receive language support and assistance from the teachers of the language learning class if necessary.

If students have obtained a sufficient command of the language of instruction before the end of their maximum attendance of language learning classes, they can leave earlier. The Monitoring Council, which meets at least twice a year, makes recommendations for the integration of newcomers into mainstream classes based on their progress and monitors newcomers' development until they are fully integrated into mainstream classes. The ZFP can accompany schools that educate newcomer students upon request and conducts language proficiency tests once a year with all newcomer students in the German-speaking Community.

A fundamental element for an efficient and high-quality language education for newcomer students is the preparation of their teachers. In the German-speaking Community, a dedicated decree defines the roles of

teachers of language learning classes and language learning courses in primary education as well as the role of teachers of language learning classes in secondary education. To qualify for these positions, staff need to have the following minimum qualifications or certificates (MDG, 2019[20]):

- A primary school teacher diploma OR a master's or bachelor's degree in German Studies (basic subject German) supplemented by a teaching qualification of at least 30 ECTS credits (Agrégation or CAP+). Teachers of the French language need a master's or bachelor's degree in Romance Studies (basic direction French).
- Proof of successful completion of at least 10 ECTS points of additional training in "German as a second language" for teachers of the German language, or in "French as a second language" for teachers of the French language.
- A certificate stating that the staff member meets CEFR level C1 competence in the language taught OR a certificate of completion of upper secondary education issued in the language taught.

The minimum qualifications for teachers of language learning classes and courses acknowledge that strong and specific competences are required to teach newcomer students effectively and they signal a commitment to providing newcomer students with high-quality instruction to facilitate their integration into the Community's education system.

While the support for language learning is a fundamental step in the integration of newcomer students, there are some risks and limitations that should be taken into account to support the fostering of equity and inclusion within the system. These are developed more extensively in this chapter's section on challenges.

Gifted students increasingly receive targeted support

As described above, since 2018, support for gifted students has increasingly become a policy priority in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. Even though the Ministry uses a broader definition of giftedness, support has so far been focused on the group of gifted students that show high intellectual potential (MDG, 2021[14]). The Community's schools use a number of pedagogical strategies to support gifted students, including individualisation through internal differentiation, acceleration, enrichment and grouping (MDG, 2022[5]).

Research shows that, across OECD countries, acceleration and enrichment are two of the main strategies used to support gifted students in reaching their full potential (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[22]). Acceleration can be defined as "an educational intervention based on the mastery of higher grade-level knowledge than typical grade-level content or speeding up the pace of the material presented" (Kim, 2016, p. 103[23]). In other words, this strategy consists of providing a student with a curricular programme at a faster pace or at a younger age than her/his peers. Practices associated with acceleration might include grade-skipping, early entrance into pre-primary education, school or higher education or subject-specific acceleration (Steenbergen-Hu, Makel and Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016[24]). In comparison with acceleration, enrichment "provides richer and more varied [curricular] content through modification and supplementation of content in addition to standard content in the regular classroom" (Kim, 2016, p. 103[23]). As mentioned above, the German-speaking Community allows acceleration measures to be taken for students with an IQ above 125 and a specific intelligence profile, who are cleared by an external evaluation board. These students are allowed to skip between levels from primary to secondary education. Concerning enrichment in the Community, this support strategy is organised by schools with the support of the ZFP, which helps teachers to adapt their teaching to each student.

Moreover, gifted education often relies on a differentiated pedagogy, which can also be merely called differentiation (ANEIS, 2017, p. 41[25]; Eyre, 2012[26]). This notion refers to educational strategies used by teachers and other educational staff based on a flexible education which adapts to the personal students' individual cognitive and psycho-social characteristics. Differentiation "means building instruction from students' passions and capacities, helping students personalise their learning and assessments in ways that foster engagement and talents, and encouraging students to be ingenious" (OECD, 2018, p. 6[27]).

Another strategy used to support gifted students is to group them to learn together with students of similar ability or achievement levels (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[22]). Some research supports the separate classroom method, maintaining that it enables gifted learners to work with similar ability peers and engage in more challenging and appropriate learning than they would in a mixed-ability class. Studies find that it can lead to greater academic achievement and that it can have a positive effect on the social development of students – if it is combined with time spent in mix-ability classes (Reis and Renzulli, 2010[28]; Rogers, 2007[29]; Sahlgren, 2018[30]; Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2019[31]). However, ability grouping strategies for gifted students are subject to significant controversy among educators and academics, primarily because of concerns around elitism and gaps or inconsistencies in recent research. Researchers also suggest a careful use of this classroom strategy because there is some indication that students' academic self-concept can suffer if high-performing students are too often grouped in homogenous high-ability classes, rather than mixed-ability classes (Mendaglio, 2013[32]). Yet, the available evidence on the impact of grouping strategies on gifted students' socio-emotional well-being is still too scarce to yield definitive conclusions (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[22]).

When supporting gifted students, it is important to consider their socio-emotional needs along with their academic needs. In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, a working group on giftedness plans and implements the "Days for Bright Minds" (*Tage für helle Köpfe*) programme. The rationale of this programme stems from the observation that gifted children often feel "different" but do not know how to define or categorise these feelings. During the "Days for Bright Minds", they have the opportunity to meet and exchange with students in a similar situation. The students can pursue their special talents in various working groups, creative and linguistic activities or specific subject areas, such as natural sciences. These activities take place on three Saturdays a year and on three consecutive days during the summer holidays (MDG, 2022[5]). The OECD review team has been informed that the students participating in these activities are generally nominated by principals who ask families whether their children would be interested in participating. This selection mechanism may be favouring socio-economically advantaged students, who have more involved parents on average and more means to participate in these activities. However, the participation fee for the three-day activity is relatively low (about EUR 30 for food-related expenses), which reduces socio-economic barriers to participation.

The Community's structured support system around giftedness not only addresses students, but also their schools and teachers. Schools can receive support in the form of advice when developing and implementing internal school projects for the support of gifted children. Moreover, teachers involved in the implementation of these school projects can receive information and further support from the ZFP. The ZFP helps to raise awareness and inform teachers about definitions of giftedness and its diagnosis, different strategies to support gifted students (including differentiation, acceleration, enrichment and grouping) as well as creating a learning and feedback culture that promotes giftedness (MDG, 2022[5]). In addition, exchanges between interested teachers can be organised on themes such as effective learning strategies and differentiation techniques for gifted students as well as recommended literature.

While the German-speaking Community has significantly advanced the development of its support system for gifted students over the last years, the identification of gifted students is still quite narrow. Although the Ministry reports to use a relatively broad definition of giftedness, the legislation focuses mostly on ability tests as identification strategies (MDG, 2021[14]). Over the past decades, the concept of giftedness as well as its identification have been expanded internationally. For instance, the literature on the identification of giftedness highlights a range of identification methods (Sękowski and Łubianka, 2015[33]):

1. *Psychological diagnosis*, conducted by a psychologist and/or specialised educators through intelligence quotient assessments that provide comprehensive reports on the nuances of students' cognitive performance (Parekh, S. Brown and Robson, 2018, p. 4[34]).
2. *Ability tests*, most of which focus on academic performance, although some look at the way students learn and/or their involvement in a specific domain (Cao, Jung and Lee, 2017[35]).

3. *Teacher nominations*, which are thought to be one of the most reliable methods since teachers spend a large amount of time with their students and can have significant pedagogical experience.
4. *Parental nominations*, which are a subjective tool in the identification process and are usually not used on their own.
5. *Peer opinion*, which are also rarely used on their own but can give a quick and adequate idea of which students are the best in a certain domain.
6. *Self-identification*, by letting students participate in out-of-school educational, scientific or creative activities and programmes in order to identify their motivation and potential.

Some of these identification processes could be adopted by the Community as means to identify a broader spectrum of talents or to streamline the identification of gifted students' potential. Since talent does not necessarily go hand in hand with achievement – as acknowledged by the Ministry – support can also be useful for students that have specific talents but struggle to achieve their full potential. This would require moving beyond a legal definition that focuses exclusively on IQ as a measure of giftedness and considering a wider range of identification methods and support strategies, as discussed in this chapter's section on policy recommendations.

The importance of multilingualism in the education system is recognised

The language policy of the German-speaking Community aims at supporting German as a Community language, while guaranteeing that students will be integrated into the wider Walloon Region and will have access to higher education, which most students pursue in the French Community (Bouillon, 2018[36]; Mettewie and Van Mensel, 2020[37]). Multilingualism is therefore considered an important prerequisite for students' social and cultural development as well as for their professional success (Mettewie and Van Mensel, 2020[37]). During interviews, the OECD review team gained the impression that multilingualism is considered by stakeholders as a strength and advantage in the German-speaking Community as many students and adults study and work abroad.

Multilingualism is associated with a range of cognitive, social, personal, academic and professional benefits (Herzog-Punzenberger, Le Pichon-Vorstman and Siarova, 2017[38]) and studies indicate that children exposed to more than one language tend to perform better than their monolingual peers (Cummins, 2000[39]; Mehmedbegovic and Bak, 2017[40]). Facilitating students' learning of multiple languages requires the support of families, communities, school leaders and teachers as well as relevant professional development for teachers.

German is the language of instruction in all schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, except in the French-language school in Eupen (*Ecole communale pour enfants d'expression française*, ECEF) and in primary schools where French-speaking sections have been set up to cater to the French-speaking minority. The first foreign language is usually French, except for the French-speaking sections in primary schools, where German is the first foreign language (MDG, 2021[41]). Students start learning their first foreign language during their pre-primary education, with activities of 50 to 200 minutes per week. As part of a pilot project, schools can also increase the proportion of foreign language activities in pre-primary education to 350 minutes per week or to 40% of teaching time (MDG, 2022[5]).

The early immersion in a foreign language can be seen as a strength of the German-speaking Community's school system. From the first year of primary school, the first foreign language is a compulsory subject with a minimum of two hours per week, which progressively increases up to at least five hours by the sixth grade. In primary education, the subjects of art, music and sport can also be taught in the first foreign language. In addition to the pilot project at the pre-primary level, at the secondary level, teaching in a foreign language can be expanded to the subjects of mathematics, geography, history and science and account for a maximum of 40% of the total teaching time (MDG, 2021[41]). In general secondary education, students need to receive at least four lessons of French-language instruction per week. In technical and vocational secondary education, students are taught French for at least two lessons per week.

Overall, while multilingualism is seen as a strength and source of potential of the education system in the German-speaking Community, some challenges remain. The core curricula envisage that students should attain competence at level B2 of the CEFR by the end of secondary school. This may be insufficient for studying or working in the French Community and parents, students, business representatives and social partners have expressed their desire for French as first foreign language to be promoted even more. While the OECD review team has been told that there are differences in the level of proficiency reached by students in the northern and southern areas of the Community, the overall objective should be for all to reach sufficient competency in the foreign language to enable them to communicate with their fellow Belgian citizens, to participate fully in society and to study in their own country. Besides achieving proficiency in both German and French, there are also demands among stakeholders to further promote English language skills to foster a truly multilingual Community (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]).

Challenges

Despite the German-speaking Community's strengths in identifying inclusion as a priority and recognising the different needs of some student groups, there are some challenges that need to be tackled in order to make further progress towards equity and inclusion for all students. In particular, the Community is adopting a quite narrow understanding of inclusive education, which could limit the support provided to students beyond certain focus groups. This limited understanding is apparent when considering the insufficient use of differentiation and formative assessment in schools, the high grade repetition rates, the lack of evaluations on the effectiveness of measures such as Time-Out, concerns regarding the lack of coherence between school-based and out-of-school care and the limited training of teachers in the area of inclusion. Moreover, parts of the existing support structures show rigidities that can create barriers for diverse groups of students. Finally, the lack of disaggregated data diminishes the system's ability to monitor its progress towards inclusion and equity goals and its ability to engage in evidence-based policy making in these areas.

There is a narrow understanding of what inclusive education means and which elements in the education system can affect it

The way in which international education systems have approached students with diverse needs has evolved throughout the decades. Researchers broadly distinguish between four different approaches: exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion – the latter two being the most relevant. According to the literature, integration is achieved by placing students with diverse needs in mainstream education settings. Although students may be provided with some adaptations and resources, this approach is generally based on the assumption that students fit into pre-existing structures, attitudes and a largely unaltered environment (UNESCO, 2017[6]). For example, integration can imply placing a student with a physical impairment or a learning disability in a regular class but without any individualised support and with a teacher who is unwilling or unable to meet the child's learning, social or disability support needs.

Although the terms integration and inclusion are sometimes confused or used interchangeably, they are distinct concepts with significant differences. Inclusion in education is defined as "an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (UNESCO, 2009[42]). An inclusive approach to education focuses on changing the system to fit the student, not changing the student to fit the system. It considers individual students' exclusion to be the result of the system's characteristics, rather than that of those of the person in question (UNICEF, 2014[43]). According to UNICEF (2014[43]), inclusive education is defined as a dynamic process that is constantly evolving according to the local culture and context, as it seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination, celebrate diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers to learning and participation for all people. All personal differences (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, language, health status, etc.) are acknowledged and respected.

In practice, stakeholders often use the term integration to refer to immigrant and refugee students, whereas inclusion is more often used to refer to students with SEN and, historically, the literature on inclusion in education has focused almost exclusively on students with SEN. This can lead to a narrow conception of inclusion that focuses on only one dimension of diversity. Nowadays it is becoming increasingly common to see the concept of inclusive education used to refer all children, including students with SEN as only one among multiple historically marginalised groups (Cummings, Dyson and Millward, 2003[44]). This broader view of inclusion incorporates students with different needs and backgrounds, such as immigrant and refugee students, male and female students, students from ethnic minorities, gifted students, students with different gender identities and sexual orientations, as well as students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, external evaluations show that students learn to perceive and accept diversity as a natural part of school life (Cormann and Goor, 2021[18]). Nonetheless, the focus on inclusion lies mostly on students with SEN, with some focus also on newcomer students and gifted students. Other diverse groups of students who may need additional support are not considered to a great extent.

The narrow understanding of inclusion corresponds to a limited use of practices, tools and methods to promote inclusion in schools, including the use of differentiation and formative student assessment. The limited use of these techniques can also contribute to higher levels of grade repetition since students may fall through the cracks. Grade repetition often particularly affects vulnerable students the most and undermines their inclusion in schools. Furthermore, the school system and out-of-school care (*außerschulische Betreuung*, AUBE) are not integrated, which may further limit the support available to all students. Limited data, monitoring and evaluation may further exacerbate the existing inequalities due to insufficient evidence on the effects of support measures.

Differentiation and formative student assessment are insufficiently embedded in daily teaching and learning

During the review visit, the OECD team gained the impression that differentiation and formative student assessments play a relatively minor role as pedagogical tools in the German-speaking Community. The limited differentiation and insufficient monitoring and support of students at risk of dropping out may be related to some of the Community's challenges, such as the high grade repetition rate, and may be exacerbated by the limited exchanges between teachers, subjects and education levels around the holistic development of each student.

The 2021 report on external evaluation confirmed that insufficient attention is paid to actively and systematically handling the heterogeneity of students by engaging in differentiated instruction and using an appropriate subject-specific didactic lesson design (Cormann and Goor, 2021[18]). More specifically, differentiation by competency level was only observed in about 18.7% of sampled classes. Differentiation by competency level, time and scope was determined in about 11% of the cases (Cormann and Goor, 2021[18]). An earlier study on homework in the German-speaking Community showed that differentiation in the content and scope of homework assignments was rather limited at both primary and secondary levels (Sereni, 2011[45]).

While most education systems use summative assessments to evaluate students' progress, assessment may also serve the formative function of shaping and deepening students' subsequent learning process. Formative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment "for learning", rather than "of learning". In the classroom, this can take the form of frequent, interactive assessments of students' progress and understanding with the goal to identify learning needs and adjust teaching practices accordingly (OECD, 2013[46]). Teachers using formative assessment are better prepared to meet diverse students' needs through differentiation and the adaptation of their teaching, to raise student achievement and promote greater equity in student outcomes (OECD, 2008[47]). Indeed, formative assessment practices typically pay particular attention to student groups at risk of underperformance, such as students from cultural or language minorities and students with special education needs (OECD, 2013[46]).

The use of formative assessment can extend beyond the classroom to promote the goals of lifelong learning throughout the education system, including higher levels of achievement, greater equity of student outcomes

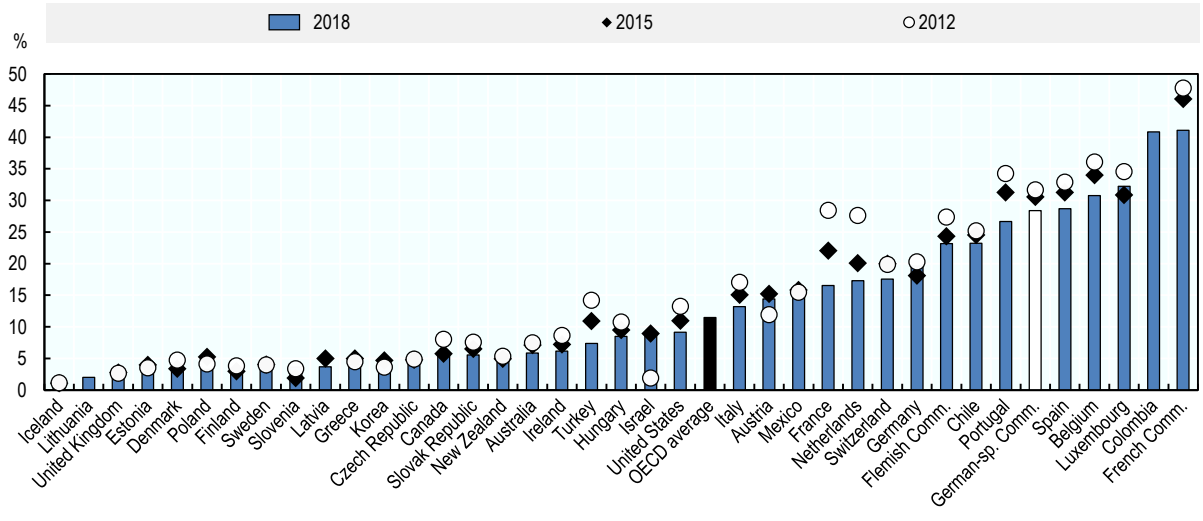
and improved learning-to-learn skills (OECD, 2008[47]; Looney, 2011[48]). However, in the German-speaking Community the use of formative assessment to adapt teaching to students at different levels remains limited, as reported in the latest reports of the external evaluation (Cormann and Goor, 2021[18]). This was also the impression that the OECD review team gained during the visit. One of the prerequisites for a wider use of formative assessment practices is to develop teachers' capacity as well as fostering students' ability to engage in their own assessment (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, it is important to ensure that student assessment is inclusive and responsive to different learners' needs and that assessment practices are well-aligned with the system's wider educational goals (OECD, 2013[46]).

Grade repetition rates remain high

Grade repetition (or retention) constitutes a form of vertical differentiation in schools, which seeks to adapt the curriculum to student performance and create more homogeneous learning environments by modifying the distribution of students across grades. Although some research suggests that repeating a grade generally does not yield improvements in learning outcomes and is associated with high economic and social costs, grade repetition is still commonly used in many OECD countries (OECD, 2016[49]). As mentioned in Chapter 1, grade repetition is relatively frequent in the German-speaking Community, particularly in some schools. PISA 2018 data suggest that, among 15-year-old students, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school (OECD, 2020, pp. 308, Table V.B2.2.9[50]). This was significantly above the OECD average of 11.4%. In 2018, 13% of 15-year-olds reported to have repeated at least one grade in primary education and 12.6% to have repeated at least once in lower secondary education (compared to 6.7% and 5.5% respectively across the OECD) (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Trends in grade repetition, 2012-2018

Percentage of 15-year-old students who repeated at least one grade in primary, lower or upper secondary school



Sources: OECD (2020[50]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.2.9 and V.B1.2.9; OECD (2016[49]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en, Tables B2.II.33 and II.5.9; OECD (2013[51]), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en, Tables B2.IV.1 and IV.2.2.

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Whether or not a student repeats a grade is usually formally decided on the basis of their academic performance, but some studies suggest that students' behaviour and other factors can also influence the decision (OECD, 2015[52]). PISA data show that, across OECD countries, students with poorer academic performance are more likely to have repeated a grade but that students' behaviour and motivation are also related to grade repetition. In 2015, students who reported that they had skipped a day of school or arrived late for school at least once in the two weeks prior to the PISA test were 38% and 24% more likely, respectively, to have repeated a grade than students who reported that they had not done so. Many stakeholders would agree that performance, behaviour and motivation are legitimate reasons for deciding which students repeat a grade. Nevertheless, PISA has consistently shown that, even after accounting for students' academic performance, self-reported behaviour and attitudes, students with certain characteristics are more likely to have repeated a grade in many education systems (OECD, 2015[52]). For instance, across OECD countries, boys are more likely to have repeated a grade than girls, socio-economically disadvantaged students are more likely than advantaged students, and students with an immigrant background are more likely than students with no immigrant background. In Belgium, data from PISA 2018 show that boys were more likely to have repeated a grade than girls and that both first and second-generation immigrant students were more likely to have repeated a grade than native students. As in many school systems, the probability of repeating a grade in the German-speaking Community also appears to be associated with students' socio-economic status (De Witte et al., 2018, p. 17[53]).

The evidence on grade repetition is mixed but generally concludes that it is not likely to remediate academic failure or behavioural difficulties (Allen et al., 2009[54]; OECD, 2020[50]). Research examining the efficacy of grade retention generally does not demonstrate academic advantages for retained students relative to comparison groups of low-achieving peers and even in analyses that find positive effects they are usually not maintained over time (Jimerson, 2001[55]) (Jimerson et al., 2005[56]). Instead, research suggests to focus on instructional strategies and specific interventions to facilitate the education of children at risk of academic failure. For instance, literature related to both grade repetition and early school leaving focuses on creating Early Warning Systems (EWS) (OECD, 2021[57]). EWS are intended to provide actionable predictors of students experiencing challenges in order to help guide targeted interventions that can prevent student failure. The EWS are often aimed at preventing early school leaving, but can also be adopted for students at risk of grade repetition.

In Latvia, for instance, the "Tackling early school leaving project" lets teachers create an individual support plan for each student at the beginning of the school year based on an assessment of various risk factors (OECD, 2021[58]). Follow-up support measures include, for example, consultations with specialists, which can be adapted based on students' risk of failing a year. The Flemish Community of Belgium provides another example. Following school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flemish Community organised remedial courses outside of regular school hours during the school year and during holiday periods in order to reduce grade repetition. Small groups of students were offered tailor-made solutions to catch up on learning deficits and to become more resilient, in particular with regards to important school transitions (Eurydice, 2021[59]).

In addition to the lack of academic benefits, empirical evidence suggests that students who were retained hold more negative attitudes towards school at the age of 15 than students who had not repeated a grade in primary or in secondary education. Students who repeated a grade are also more likely to drop out of school entirely (Manacorda, 2012[60]). Studies have also suggested that grade retention can have harmful socio-emotional effects and that it is detrimental to students' behavioural and academic adjustment (Jimerson et al., 2005[56]). In addition, grade repetition can negatively affect students' well-being, their sense of belonging to the school community and their life satisfaction. On average across EU countries in 2015, students who repeated a grade were six percentage points less likely to report being satisfied with life and difference was above eight percentage points in Belgium (OECD, 2018[10]). It should also be noted that grade repetition can be a costly policy since it requires resources for an additional year of schooling and delays students' entry into the labour market (OECD, 2013[61]).

The German-speaking Community does not regularly monitor the rate of year repetition, which limits its ability to analyse whether the practice is affecting disadvantage students the most in their education system.

Nevertheless, it stands to reason that the high rate of grade repetition in the German-speaking Community is likely to have a negative impact on the students' academic and socio-emotional well-being while also posing a risk to equity, considering that some student groups are usually more affected than others.

Reducing a system's reliance on grade repetition requires significant efforts, ranging from changing the mindsets of all actors involved in the education systems (including teachers, school leaders, parents and students) to the creation of robust and well-planned didactic alternatives. For instance, the French Community of Belgium aims to develop strategies to combat school failure, drop-out and repetition in order to improve the role of education as a source of social emancipation while focusing on quality for all and promoting inclusive schooling. With its systemic educational reform, the "Pact for Excellence in Teaching", the French Community has set itself the target to reduce the rate of grade repetition by 50% by 2030, while increasing average student achievement in basic skills. The French Community's strategic approach to combating failure and repetition is holistic and based on a set of specific responses to learning difficulties, as well as on initiatives targeting students and their parents (Enseignement en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2017[62]).

The effectiveness of Time-Out is unclear

As mentioned in Chapter 1, since 2018, the German-speaking Community's Time-Out centres provide supervision to youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of full-time education or apprenticeships due to socio-emotional and behavioural problems. The centres support students in reflecting on their educational or professional goals, aim to build their long-term motivation and help them develop the competences needed to pursue these goals with a view to reintegrate them into an educational or professional pathway after a limited period of time.[6]

For young people who are not enrolled in a school or Vocational Education and Training institution or who have lost their connection, Time-Out aims to support the development of future and life perspectives. In contrast to the centre for part-time vocational education (*Teilzeitunterricht*, TZU), the Time-Out facility is emphasises self-directed learning and an individual and social pedagogical approach. The Time-Out facility aims to offer individual experiential and action-oriented learning spaces tailored to each young person. The target group of the Time-Out centres is affected by a lack of perspective, especially at the school level, and Time-Out seeks to support some of the most vulnerable youth. In practice, a staff member from the Time-Out facility who has pedagogical training is in charge of supporting the participating youth in building specific subject-related competences. During their time in the programme, participants primarily rework their school and vocational projects in order to develop sustained motivation and competences with a view to realising their personal learning, career and life perspectives. The average length of the care period is 12 months including holidays. 44% of participants attend the programme for less than 9 months and 39% for more than 12 months. During the reintegration of participants, the remedial education counsellors of the Time-Out facility work closely with schools to facilitate the students' transition.

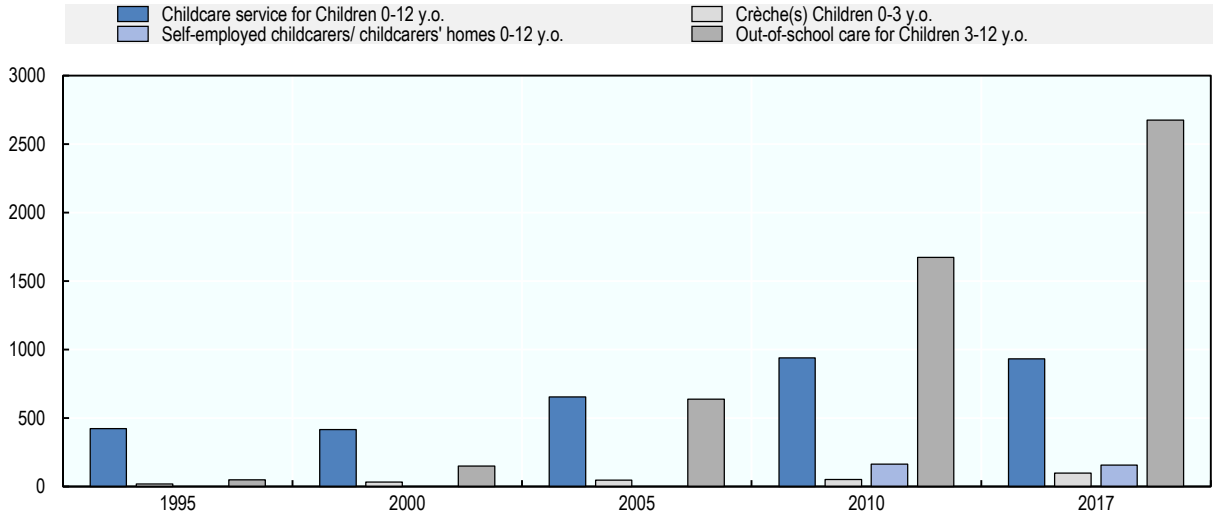
So far, the impact of the Time-Out programme has not been systematically evaluated by the external evaluation or another institution. It is therefore not possible to assess whether and to what extent this form of support has the desired effect on participants. Another limitation is that Time-Out centres currently only target older students between the ages of 12 to 18. If an evaluation shows the system to be effective, it should be considered to expand its services to younger children who may also be disengaged from education. There are already plans to create a similar institution for the integration of children aged five to 12 (the *Systemische Kindereinrichtung mit bindungsorientierter Pädagogik,* SKEI), which would seek to support students' progression in schools and their development of social and emotional skills (MDG, 2022[5]).

Concerns about lack of coherence between school and out-of-school care

The Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium has set itself the goal to meet 100% of the Community's demand for childcare by 2025 and the number of children aged 3 to 12 years that are covered by these services has significantly increased between 1995 and 2017 (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7. Childcare services in the German-speaking Community, 1995-2017

Number of children enrolled in different types of childcare service



Source: Government of the German-speaking Community (2018[63]), *Masterplan 2025*, https://www.bvktp.de/media/masterplan_stand_oktober_2018_definitiv_1.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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There are different forms of out-of-school care (AUBE) offered in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, which happen outside the school. The AUBE is a childcare service for all children from the first year of pre-primary education until the end of primary school. The extracurricular care is clearly separated from everyday school life and usually takes place outside the classroom and during the times when children are not in pre-primary or primary school (MDG, 2021[64]), either in the morning before school, in the afternoon after school, on Wednesday afternoons or during the schools' staff training days.

There are 25 locations for out-of-school care in the German-speaking Community. Of these, 23 are connected to the regional centre for early childhood and care (*Regionalzentrum fur Kleinkindbetreuung*, RZKB). The remaining two locations are the Pater Damian primary school (Eupen) and the Königliches Athenäum Eupen, which only children registered in these schools can attend. The parental contribution is calculated based on their income[7] and is partially tax deductible up to the age of 12 (MDG, 2021[64]).

As in most OECD countries, students in the German-speaking Community are expected to work on homework assignments after the end of their school days. Some studies have raised concerns about homework amplifying educational inequalities since advantaged students are more likely to benefit from it, whereas disadvantaged students more often lack access to a quiet place to study, internet access and support from their parents (Rønning, 2011[65]; OECD, 2020[50]). OECD PISA data also show that there is a considerable difference in time spent doing homework between advantaged and disadvantaged students and between different types of schools (OECD, 2014[66]). School-based homework support can be one way of addressing these concerns (OECD, 2020[50]).

The out-of-school care (AUBE) organised by the Government does not include homework support. While children have the opportunity to do their homework at the AUBE autonomously, supervisors cannot provide them with individual help (Government of the German-speaking Community, 2021[67]). This is linked to the qualification and role description of staff engaged in out-of-school care. The lack of homework support offered as part of AUBE may place students who would benefit from supervision to improve their academic performance at a disadvantage. Since the German-speaking Community does not collect any socio-economic information on

the families of students relying on AUBE, it is not possible to assess the extent to which these services are used by vulnerable populations or not.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a significant proportion of homework support in the German-speaking Community is provided outside of schools and the AUBE. A number of providers offer homework support in so-called homework schools (these are the homework school Ephata in Eupen, the homework school ÖSHZ in Raeren, the Red Cross homework school in St. Vith and the Cardijn homework school in Eupen).[8] The homework schools in Eupen and Raeren (and soon also in Kelmis) are supported by the Competency Centre (*Kompetenzzentrum*) of the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (ZFP), which provide some staff and create a network of all homework schools. The homework schools work mainly with volunteers and their services are open to all students in primary and secondary schools. They are either free or charge a small fee of about EUR 1 per hour or EUR 5 per week.

A study shows that supervision in the homework schools is primarily used by primary students but also by some lower secondary and upper secondary students. A large proportion of the students taking part in homework supervision have an immigrant background. Around 58% of the homework carers surveyed indicated that 75-99% of the students in their school have an immigrant background (Sereni, 2011[45]).

The Parliament and the Government have commissioned a study to evaluate the extent to which students rely on after-school support, whether parents helped with students' homework and whether there were socio-economic discrepancies in the access to either type of support (Moroni, 2020[68]). According to the survey, about 20% of students reported using tutoring services, of which one quarter were free of charge and three quarters charged tuition. Among these students, half took advantage of private tuition in order to better understand the subject matter, and 45.7% reported seeking extra tuition to improve their grades because their grade promotion was at risk. Parents were also asked whether tutoring was a major financial burden for them. On a scale from 1 ("does not apply at all") to 4 ("fully applies"), parents reported a score of 1.91 on average, suggesting that it is not generally considered a major financial burden, although it may be a significant expense for some families. Moreover, the OECD review team learnt that not all schools and municipalities offer homework support, which creates inequalities in access. Another study from 2011 found that around 13% of primary school students in the German-speaking Community engaged in private tutoring (9.1% "regularly" and 4.9% "rarely"). At the secondary level, almost 30% of parents stated that their child received private tutoring (10.9% "regularly" and 18.9% "rarely"). Since not all parents may be able to afford tutoring, this could also create equity concerns (Sereni, 2011[45]).

Through the regional centre for early childhood and care (RZKB), holiday care is offered to children and their families. For children from nursery school age, holiday care is available during the school holidays (one week during the autumn, Christmas and Carnival holidays, two weeks during the Easter holidays and 2-3 weeks during the summer holidays) from 7:30-17:30 at various locations, also for children from outside the school. Rates differ depending on the household income.[9] Other providers, besides the RZKB, also organise holiday care. The Government subsidises municipalities that organise holiday care for children of age 3 to 12, some of which work with local providers from the cultural and sports sector to offer the service. In addition, some private providers offer holiday care.

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community runs or supports a number of programmes offering extra-curricular enrichment in the fields of arts, theatre and sports,[10] alongside a variety of external providers of services that complement the educational and extra-curricular offer of schools. Parents and schools usually approach these providers directly and there is little external co-ordination between them (MDG, 2022[5]). The main providers include Kaleido Ostbelgien, the Competency Centre of the ZFP, the so-called "homework schools" (*Hausaufgabenschulen*) described above, the Time-Out centres, various sport clubs and youth clubs, the music academy, the Institute for Civic Education at the AHS (*Institut für Demokratiepädagogik*) and others.

Even though there have been discussions about a reform of the system since 2020, the out-of-school care (*AUBE*), holiday care, homework schools and extracurricular activities remain weakly connected and not integrated into the education system. The Minister of Education and Scientific Research has commissioned an

external legal evaluation of the reorientation of the RZKB in order to assess whether the activities of the RZKB could be integrated into the education system to create synergies between AUBE and the school system. The findings of this evaluation indicate that the RZKB will not become a para-Community institution and will therefore not be integrated into the education system, at least legally.

The link between activities within and outside of schools can have an important impact on students' social integration, their sense of belonging and general well-being. Overall, research from 2016 suggests that students with SEN that are integrated into mainstream education feel well integrated with their classmates and seem to have a good sense of belonging to the school community (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). According to research of the Université Catholique de Louvain, 83.5% of students with SEN that were integrated into mainstream education responded that they are usually with at least one friend in the playground (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). However, students with SEN felt little affiliation with other students outside their school and reported being rarely invited to play outside the classroom, to do extracurricular activities or for birthday parties. Moreover, when asked about the ease of making friends or whether they would like more friends, their answers were quite divided. This is particularly challenging for secondary students, whose sense of affiliation with classmates outside their school was even lower than for primary school students. The lack of connections between in-school and after-school activities in the German-speaking Community may contribute to these findings since it means that there are relatively few activities that bring together students from across the education system outside of school.

At the classroom level, there were no differences in students' sense of affiliation between those integrated into mainstream primary education and those integrated into mainstream secondary education. When parents were asked the same questions about their child being invited for activities with classmates outside of school (to play, for a birthday party or an outing), they had the same perception and considered, on average, that such interactions were rare or limited (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). The OECD review team also observed a disconnect between school policy and youth policy and exchanges between different departments are rather selective and not systematic (see Chapter 2). The youth department's strategy plans (*Jugendstrategieplan*) are not used by the school departments even though there is no comparable school plan. This could limit the policy coherence around child development.

A further challenge related to the support of students in out-of-school activities concerns the organisation of the school calendar. In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the school rhythm is organised around a long summer break that generally takes place from the beginning of July to the end of August, along with shorter breaks throughout the year.[11] This corresponds to the traditional school calendar adopted in many OECD countries, with short breaks during the school year and a long summer break (Graves, 2011[69]). One concern raised by the traditional school calendar is the learning loss that students may incur during the long summer break, and the lack of alternative educational offerings during these periods. According to the literature, differences in the extent to which learning during the summer is supported by students' family and community widens the achievement gap across social lines (Cooper et al., 1996[70]). Since socio-economically advantaged children are more likely to have access to additional learning activities during the summer or receive help from their families they tend to experience less of a summer learning loss than their disadvantaged peers (Alexander, Entwisle and Olson, 2007[71]). Considering that, issues related to summer breaks and the planning of the school rhythm should be taken into account as relevant elements for equity issues. Year-round school calendars that distribute holidays more evenly over the year have been proposed as a way to alleviate this problem (Graves, 2011[69]). The school rhythm is discussed in more detail in the policy recommendations below.

Limited initial teacher education and continuing professional learning opportunities in the area of inclusive education (for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff)

Developing inclusive teaching environments in which all students, but especially diverse ones, can thrive is key to promoting equitable and inclusive learning opportunities and fostering students' well-being (Brussino, 2021[72]). Teachers play a fundamental role in this since they are tasked to design and implement inclusive

teaching practices that adequately meet diverse students' needs and learning styles. To do so, they must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to incorporate inclusive teaching strategies into their pedagogical approaches, curricula and assessment practices. School leaders and non-teaching staff also have an important role to play in the development of inclusive schools and learning settings.

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff do not seem well prepared to teach students with some types of special education needs while reporting greater confidence in dealing with other disorders. A study from the Catholic University of Louvain asked mainstream teachers to report on their sense of competence in supporting students with special education needs, according to the type of needs these students may have (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). Table 3.3 lists the different conditions in decreasing order of teachers' reported confidence in meeting their needs.

Table 3.3. Teachers' confidence in teaching students with different conditions in the German-speaking Community, 2016

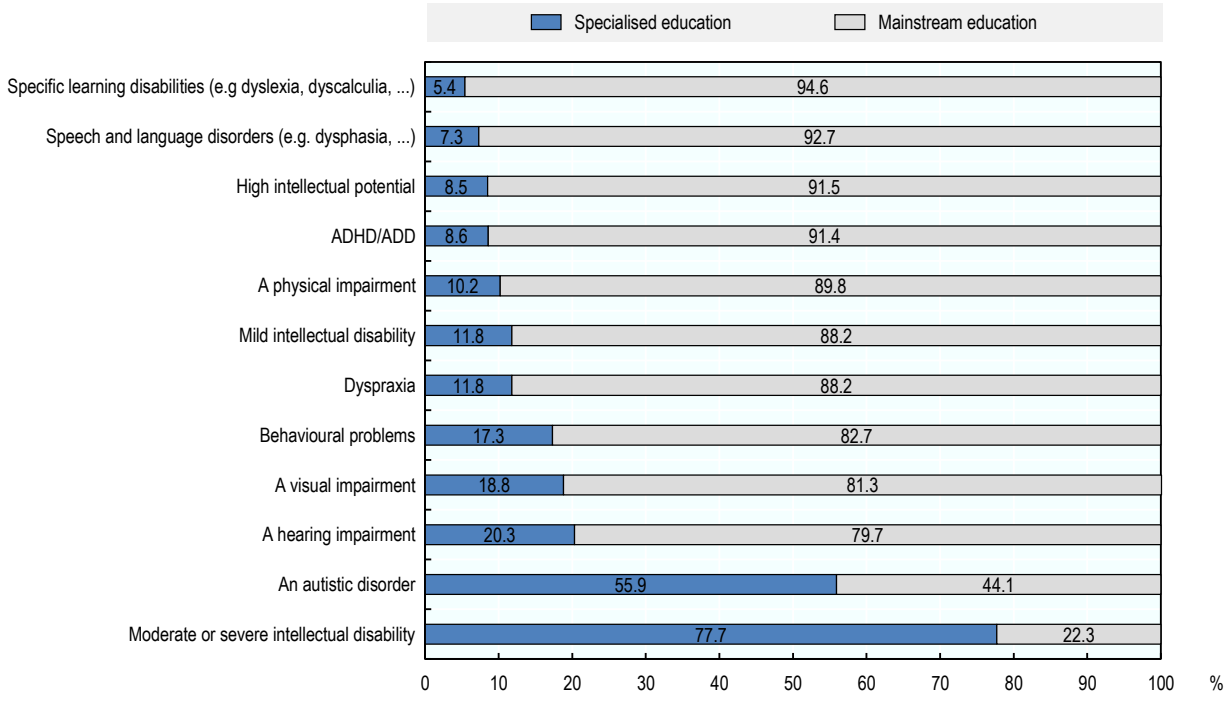
"I feel able to provide education that meets the specific needs of students with…"	Average (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree")	Standard deviation	N
... mild intellectual disability	5.77	1.239	128
... a physical impairment	5.59	1.398	125
... a high intellectual potential	5.16	1.499	125
... specific learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia...)	5	1.489	121
... ADHD	4.89	1.494	124
... behavioural problems	4.7	1.393	127
... speech and language disorders (e.g. dysphasia...)	4.62	1.555	122
... a visual impairment	4.6	1.775	124
... a hearing impairment	4.6	1.839	122
... dyspraxia	4.39	1.68	104
... moderate or severe intellectual disability	3.28	1.68	127
... an autistic disorder	3.25	1.829	124

Note: Scale from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree; Valid N: 94.
Source: Université Catholique de Louvain (2016[1]), *L'intégration d'élèves à besoins spécifiques dans l'enseignement ordinaire belge germanophone: étude menée auprès des élèves intégrés, de leur famille et des acteurs scolaires*, https://bit.ly/31Ny5NR (accessed on 15 December 2021).

On a scale from 1 to 7, mainstream teachers reported confidence in their ability to support children with mild intellectual disability, physical impairments, high intellectual potential and specific learning disabilities. Slightly lower levels of confidence were reported when teaching students with ADHD, behavioural disorders, speech and language disorders, visual and hearing impairments and dyspraxia. On average, teachers felt least confident in their ability to support students with moderate or severe intellectual disability and autistic disorder.

When asked about the appropriate setting for students with different types of special education needs, moderate or severe intellectual disability and autistic disorders were the only conditions for which a majority of mainstream teachers (56% and 77% respectively) reported that they would be better educated in special schools (Figure 3.8). For all other types of SEN, the large majority of mainstream teachers (all but 20% or less) felt that mainstream education could provide an appropriate setting for students. Educational support staff provided similar responses and most of them reported that only children with moderate or severe intellectual disability or autistic disorders should be educated in special education, whereas mainstream education was thought to be suitable for other types of special needs (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]).

Figure 3.8. Teachers' attitudes on the best setting for students with special education needs, 2016



Source: Université Catholique de Louvain (2016[1]), *L'intégration d'élèves à besoins spécifiques dans l'enseignement ordinaire belge germanophone: étude menée auprès des élèves intégrés, de leur famille et des acteurs scolaires*, https://bit.ly/31Ny5NR (accessed on 15 December 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/gyimkb

One of the ways to support the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools is through the adequate training of teaching professionals (Tremblay, 2012[73]). In general, valuing diversity and effectively fostering inclusion in the classroom depends on ensuring that teachers possess the right set of skills and knowledge (UNESCO, 2020[74]). To achieve this, teachers should be acknowledged as lifelong learners who understand and can create rich and inclusive learning environments (Brussino, 2021[72]). Equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills for inclusive teaching should start with their initial teacher education (ITE) (OECD, 2010[75]). ITE plays a central role in preparing teachers since it creates the foundation for their continuing professional learning. The objectives of ITE, the competences and contents covered, and the types of training and qualifications offered by ITE providers can influence teachers' preparedness for the inclusive classroom.

The Louvain study also examined whether mainstream teachers in the German-speaking Community valued updating their knowledge about students with special education needs and how, over the last two years, teachers have developed their knowledge. Table 3.4 shows the teachers' attitudes towards different aspects of professional development. Most teachers considered professional development to be important and useful and reported that they were interested in updating their knowledge. However, teachers also agreed that updating their knowledge takes a lot of time and is costly (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]).

Table 3.4. Mainstream teachers' attitudes towards professional development in the German-speaking Community, 2016

	Average (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree")	Standard deviation	N
Updating my knowledge is important	5.71	1.529	126
Updating my knowledge is useful	5.97	1.332	125
Updating my knowledge is interesting	5.97	1.295	125
Updating my knowledge takes a lot of time	5.74	1.355	124
Updating my knowledge is very costly	5.38	1.627	123

Note: Scale from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree; Valid N: 116.
Source: Université Catholique de Louvain (2016[1]), *L'intégration d'élèves à besoins spécifiques dans l'enseignement ordinaire belge germanophone: étude menée auprès des élèves intégrés, de leur famille et des acteurs scolaires*, https://bit.ly/31Ny5NR (accessed on 15 December 2021).

The study also investigated the frequency with which teachers in the German-speaking Community updated their knowledge about students with special education needs through in-service teacher training. About 46% of mainstream teachers reported that they take part in relevant training at least once a year, 7% take part annually and the remaining 46% had not taken part in training on special educational needs over the past two years. Exchanges with fellow teachers and educational coaches are another important source of professional learning for teachers. Nearly half of the teachers reported that they had at least weekly discussions with their colleagues or a tutor. Teachers also engaged in specialist reading and internet research (via Google), albeit slightly less frequently. Other web resources are rarely used (50-70% never use them) and independent research based on video resources, via encyclopaedias, television or radio are only conducted, on average, once or twice a year.

ITE alone cannot fully prepare teachers for their profession and some skills and pedagogical strategies can be better learnt in the classroom while teaching. Therefore, continuing professional learning (CPL) is crucial to enable teachers to respond to the challenges they encounter in the classroom by consolidating their knowledge and competences and learning new skills (Brussino, 2021[72]; OECD, 2011[76]). Strategies to promote teacher capacity for inclusive teaching can range from induction programmes and mentoring to formal and informal in-service training (OECD, 2020[77]). CPL is also important to expand teachers' skills and knowledge in response to changing student demographics as well as unforeseen developments, such as those related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which required teachers to quickly develop their capacity for distance and online teaching (OECD, 2014[78]).

Researchers from the Université Catholique de Louvain measured teachers' years of professional experience with different types of SEN. Many of the mainstream teachers surveyed had no experience with students with visual impairments (68%), dyspraxia (67%), hearing impairments (64%), autistic disorders (60%), moderate or severe intellectual disability (56%), physical impairments (48%), speech or language impairments (47%) or high intellectual potential (37%). The tutoring staff often reported that they had no experience with students with high intellectual potential (60.4%), visual impairments (56%), hearing impairments (42%), dyspraxia (33%), physical impairments (32%), speech or language difficulties (30.6%) or moderate or severe intellectual disability (26%) (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]).

Educational assistants in mainstream schools with SEN students reported having most experience with students with behavioural problems, mild intellectual disability, specific learning difficulties or ADHD. School leaders reported having most experience with students with special learning needs, ADHD, behavioural problems or mild intellectual disability. About 40-50% of the school leaders reported having 12 or more years of experience with these types of students. Their experience with other types of SEN (e.g. with moderate to severe intellectual disability, students with autistic disorder, visual or hearing impairments, or dyspraxia) was much shorter (between 1 and 3 years) or non-existent (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]).

The evidence presented so far suggest that the training and professional learning of teachers and school leaders could be a challenge for the German-speaking Community. In particular, their beliefs on the integration of certain

groups of students with SEN, their limited professional experience and low self-reported confidence suggest the need for increased training in the field. A 2020 evaluation concluded that training on these topics should be given more space as differentiation and special education are becoming increasingly important, in order to sensitise teachers and enable them to cater to all students' needs (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]). A majority of the teachers responding to the survey reported to be in favour of "sound training in the field of special needs education" at both the pre-primary level (68%) and the primary level (77%).

There is some debate over the reform of initial teacher education, in particular on whether it would be helpful to extend the initial teacher education in order to meet the increased demands on the profession (for an overview of initial teacher education in the German-speaking Community, see Chapter 4). A longer training duration would give student teachers the opportunity to gain more practical experience, to work on content in more detail or to choose a learning focus (e.g. foreign language didactics, special education or computer science). However, only 26% of the survey participants considered it sensible to introduce master's level studies (five years of study in total) for primary school teachers and 15% for pre-primary teachers. This discussion adds a layer of complexity to the general challenge of ITE in the field of special education needs (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]). There are also concerns that requiring a master's level qualification could lead to tensions and inequalities between new and experienced teachers. An alternative could be to extend the duration of the bachelor's degree by one year.

Despite the limitations described above, there are several options for teachers working with students with SEN to receive additional training. All support teachers as well as all primary and pre-primary teachers (in the future also speech therapists) who work in the context of low-threshold support are obliged to complete additional training on special education needs. This training is based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and corresponds to 15 ECTS points. It is provided by the *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (the German-speaking Community's only higher education institution) with two guest lecturers from the Intercantonal School of Special Needs Education Zurich (MDG, 2022[5]). Teachers or paramedics who work in the context of high-threshold support are obliged to complete the same additional training as support teachers, corresponding to 10 ECTS points. There is also compulsory additional training for integration teachers (MDG, 2022[5]).

The compulsory training is complemented by voluntary sensitisation programmes for teachers as well as training and further education in the field of giftedness. One training is offered in co-operation with the University of Mons ("*Certificat d'université en intervention auprès des enfants et des adolescents à hauts potentiels en difficulté*", 14 ECTS) and another with WWU Münster and Akademie Franz Hitze Haus ("Echa-Diploma of advanced Studies - Specialist in Gifted Education and Talent Development", 15 ECTS) (MDG, 2022[5]).

The ZFP can also provide counselling to teachers, school leaders and students' guardians on a range of topics, including giftedness, pedagogical counselling for newcomer students and support in the area of language learning. Moreover, they provide special education counselling on the compensation for disadvantage and grade protection measures as well as on learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, other socio-emotional disorders and physical impairments. These resources are a valuable support for all stakeholders who can rely on the specialised experience of the ZFP to get informed and update their practices for diverse students.

The *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* has further education offers in areas such as supporting gifted students, differentiation (concrete approaches to dealing with heterogeneity), heterogeneous learning groups and internal differentiation in mathematics lessons. Starting with the school year 2021/22, teachers will also be able to participate in a free and certified training on supporting gifted students, which will be offered by the University of Mons (in French). This course was organised in collaboration between the University of Mons and the Government of the German-speaking Community in order to train staff to support gifted students while deepening the synergies between the education system and external partners. Participants will receive a university certificate of 14 ECTS upon successful completion of the course (Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2021[79]).

Even though a number of trainings and professional learning opportunities are offered in the area of SEN, the OECD review team gained the impression during interviews that these opportunities are not offered regularly enough. This is also the case in the area of professional learning for students with autism. A 2016 study conducted by the Catholic University of Louvain also reported that teachers felt particularly unprepared to support students with autism as well as those with intellectual disabilities (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). Furthermore, most training and professional learning does not seem to cover broader areas of diversity, equity and inclusion such as multiculturalism and supporting newcomer students and other diverse students.

The system for supporting students with special education needs and newcomers is rigid at times and would benefit from greater coherence in the identification of students' needs

Despite the support available for students with special education needs in the German-speaking Community, the system can be overly bureaucratic and rigid. If a child or young person may need special education support (i.e. if general educational measures in the classroom are no longer sufficient), a request for an "integration project" is initiated through Kaleido. The request must be made in writing by the parents or guardian or by the principal of the mainstream school. If the mainstream school wants to initiate the procedure, the parents or guardian must agree. The principal of the mainstream school can contact the Support Conference, if those responsible for the student do not agree. The application must be submitted by 1 February at the latest for special education support to be provided in a mainstream or special school from the following school year (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2016[1]). After receiving the application, Kaleido establishes a reasoned opinion within the framework of a multidisciplinary examination and stipulates, in a binding manner:

1. If the student needs special education support.
2. The nature of the "disability".
3. In which area(s) specialised pedagogical support should be provided.
4. The nature of the special education support required (e.g. therapeutic measures, adaptations).

By 1 May of the school year preceding the year in which the support measures or an integration project are to begin, Kaleido sends its opinion to the parents or legal guardians; to the head of the regular school that the student attends or will attend in accordance with the parents' wishes; and to the school leader of the special school with which the desired regular school has been collaborating up to now, insofar as the opinion stipulates that special pedagogical support is necessary. If parents wish to enrol a child with a confirmed need for special education support in a mainstream school as an "integration project", they inform the school leader who then brings together all the stakeholders involved in the integration project and convenes a Support Conference.

At this conference, the members establish the modalities and objectives of the support and the means necessary to best accompany the student. Recommendations on the number of hours of support and the final decision by the head teacher of the special school are made by 15 June. During the school year, several Support Conferences are held to reassess the situation of the integrated students. This application process seems quite lengthy and students may need to wait for nearly a year to receive support since there appears to be only one deadline to apply for support. This annual deadline was also pointed out as too rigid by a Citizens' Council convened in 2021 (PDG, 2021[80]). Nonetheless, for new students arriving in the Community throughout the year, it is possible to receive support even after the deadline has passed.

In the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, there are different measures to support students with special education needs, such as the compensation for disadvantage (see above) and partial qualifications. However, these support measures are not sufficiently known among all stakeholders and there is uncertainty about their use (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]).

The German-speaking Community's SEN support system also suffers from a lack of clarity and coherence around its approach to defining and classifying students' special educational needs. While the system does not aim at grouping students to assign them support measures, it still categorises them in different ways. First, the system still incorporates the five groups of different needs (learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities,

developmental delays, socio-emotional and medical issues), each of which is eligible for specific support measures. Although certain disorders can fall in more than one group, which grants some flexibility, it is not clear how the groups contribute to the efficiency of the support system or the process of identifying students' needs. Second, there is a clear distinction between the types of support measures offered to students with SEN, gifted students and newcomer students. Newcomer students almost exclusively receive language support, even though some of the support offered to students with SEN could be generalised and adapted to newcomer students too. This includes, for example, the use of individual learning plans and the provision of low-threshold support to help them catch up with their peers. A more universal and inclusive approach could make these interventions more accessible and reduce the need for separate systems and rules governing the support for distinct groups of students. A more inclusive approach to pedagogy and support measures would also make the system more adaptive and prepared for future social changes.

Another challenge concerns the limitations of the support measures in place for newcomer students. Although the available support is very valuable, its focus is exclusively on learning the language of instruction. There is evidence that supports the importance of preparatory classes for the teaching and learning of the language of instruction, as they offer more time and space for the learning than mainstream classes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019[81]). This can be particularly relevant, for instance, in secondary education where students are older and less likely to pick up the new language. Moreover, in secondary education, the curriculum content and the academic requirements are increasingly difficult and require a certain proficiency in the language of instruction to be assimilated. Nevertheless, the literature shows that preparatory classes can also hinder integration by separating newcomers from natives (Ibid). This separation can delay the educational progress of newcomer students if the focus is placed too narrowly on language acquisition rather than the curriculum more broadly (Nusche, 2009[82]). For instance, in Sweden, researchers have criticised teaching the language of instruction in isolation from the subject matters of the mainstream curriculum since this can deprive students of the contextualisation needed to promote language acquisition (Nilsson and Bunar, 2015[83]; Short, 2002[84]). Where students do not have access to effective language and learning support, the full transition from preparatory to mainstream classes can become problematic (Nilsson and Axelsson, 2013[85]). It is therefore important for policy makers to consider the possible ramifications of offering language support in a segregate setting, in particular for longer time periods, and to consider the role of social contact for integration of the students and their access to the mainstream curriculum.

In response to this tension, some countries focus on providing students not only with language learning support but also with broader curricula of preparatory classes. Eurydice (2019[81]) shows that while most countries offer support for the language of instruction in preparatory classes, some integrate the learning of the students with teaching in mathematics, foreign language(s), natural sciences, social students, and other subjects. For instance, the report shows that in the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, these classes offer broader curricula. In particular, the French Community includes in its preparatory classes mathematics, natural sciences, and social studies, beyond language. Flanders offer an even more extended curriculum, which includes mathematics, social studies, information and communications technology (ICT), intercultural education and religion/ethics (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019[81]).

It may be relevant for the German-speaking Community of Belgium to consider an expansion of the curriculum of their preparatory classes in order to strengthen the support for newcomer students. Some changes are already underway. According to the Decree on Measures in the Education System 2022, the hourly capital for the language learning classes in the regular secondary education system is to be expanded by four hours for the area in mathematics teacher to promote the mathematical competences of newcomer students. The mathematics lessons for newcomer students will also be taught in German, so that these lessons can promote their language acquisition and ultimately facilitate the integration of these students into mainstream education.

In addition, most education systems ensure the provision of psycho-social support to students with an immigrant background. In the German-speaking Community organising this support is the responsibility of local authorities or schools (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019[81]). This may limit the scope of support received by

some students and lead to different levels of support across municipalities or schools, which should be carefully monitored by policy makers of the Community in order to avoid inequities.

There is a lack of disaggregated data, monitoring and evaluation

Establishing system-level frameworks to monitor the access, participation and achievement of all learners is fundamental to evaluating the progress towards reaching diversity, inclusion and equity goals and to subsequently inform policies in these areas. This includes monitoring the performance of specific student groups, such as those with special education needs or from an immigrant background. National research on the association of student and school characteristics with student performance can identify the type of information that is most pertinent to collect systematically and to include in a national indicator framework for education (OECD, 2013[46]).

Additionally, there is a need to collect information on broader aspects of educational quality, such as students' attitudes, motivation and well-being and the overall teaching and learning environment in schools. As part of this effort, there should be consideration on how to best include the perceptions of stakeholders in the national monitoring system, in particular concerning the education system's inclusivity. One way in which school systems can solicit the perspectives of stakeholders is to administer a questionnaire to a sample of students, parents, school leaders and teachers to collect their views about a range of aspects, including their academic, psychological, physical, social and material well-being.

High-performing school systems also need to systematically evaluate programmes targeted at improving inclusion and equity in education. To facilitate the evaluation of their effectiveness and impact, it is important that all new programmes are designed with an evaluation component, including targets and baseline indicators. Evaluation results should then be used to make strategic decisions about specific programmes, including their discontinuation, improvement and re-design, or adjustments to the implementation process.

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, several elements of the monitoring and evaluation systems are currently underdeveloped. The academic outcomes and well-being are not systematically monitored in a disaggregated manner for a variety of diverse students. Doing so would support policy makers' ability to differentiate between different groups of students and help them develop targeted policies and practices. Data collections should be disaggregated by relevant dimensions, not only based on gender and potential special education needs, but also based on their immigrant status or other individual characteristics where allowed by the legal system. The trade-off between privacy concerns and the system's ability to collect data to monitor sensitive student outcomes in order to better respond to their needs should be taken into account when designing monitoring systems.

A further challenge in the German-speaking Community is that policies, programmes and projects on inclusive education are rarely evaluated. This makes it challenging to highlight effective programmes and pilot projects and to scale them up across the Community. For instance, the Community could evaluate the impact of support teachers on students learning or the effect of mainstreaming students with special education needs in order to decide whether and how to expand policies to the whole student population.

Policy recommendations

Place students and their individual needs at the centre of learning

Placing students and their individual needs at the centre of learning will be key to developing a more inclusive education system. Several policy recommendations are developed in this section to guide the system towards this goal. These include streamlining the process for students with SEN to obtain support, strengthening differentiated teaching and student learning, integrating mandatory training in the area of inclusive education

during initial teacher education and providing regular professional learning opportunities on the subject for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff.

Adopt a broader definition of inclusion and implement it coherently across the education system

As discussed in the preceding section of this chapter, the German-speaking Community of Belgium uses a relatively narrow definition of inclusive education. Adopting a broader definition of inclusivity in the education system could enable the Community to further strengthen its focus on supporting all students in mainstream schools according to their individual needs. Inclusion in education is defined by UNESCO as "an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination". In an inclusive education system, all personal differences (with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, indigenous status, language, health status, etc.) are acknowledged and respected, and the core principle is that every learner matters and matters equally (Cerna et al., 2021[3]).

The promotion of inclusive education builds on a commitment to anti-discrimination policies and the identification of compensatory mechanisms in education to create systems that are affordable, accessible and adaptable to learners' needs. Inclusive education can be contrasted with policies based on separation, which aim to create homogenous groups within a heterogeneous student population and which tend to result in the isolation of some student groups, given the broader context of social and economic inequalities and power imbalances (Cerna et al., 2021[3]). Adopting a broader definition of inclusion would help the German-speaking Community in strengthening its commitment to support each student based on their specific needs and to overcome the focus on a limited set of student groups. For instance, this would entail considering not only students with SEN, newcomer students and gifted students, but also the specific needs and challenges of girls and boys in schools, and of students who belong to the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community.

Such a shift could also provide a basis for implementing legislation in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Council (2021[80]), which underlined the importance of strengthening the focus on differentiated learning. In particular, the Council noted that the German-speaking Community system seems to be very performance-oriented and presupposes homogeneity, with all students being required to achieve the same level of competence at the end of the school year. They Council instead suggested that core curricula should be made more flexible to allow students to learn at their own pace and to develop their potential in the best possible way. There is already some flexibility regarding students with special education needs who are not taught according to the core curricula and for whom the core curricula's standards form the basis for differentiation and the development of individual support plans.

An effort to create more flexibility would be supported by adopting a broader concept of inclusion that considers inclusion as a process of reducing barriers that limit the presence, participation and achievement of any learners. Adopting such a vision of inclusion would be instrumental for changing the education system to fit the students, rather than focusing on changing the students to fit the system, and acknowledging that the source of students' exclusion lies in the structure of the school system, rather than their individual characteristics (UNICEF, 2014[43]). The Citizens' Council of the German-speaking Community underlined this point, by affirming that increasing the inclusion of children with special education needs in mainstream schools would allow the German-speaking Community to become a pioneer (PDG, 2021[80]).

Despite some scholars' concerns about the limitations of fully inclusive systems, evidence suggests that all learners can attain high levels of achievement in an inclusive school system (AuCoin, Porter and Baker-Korotkov, 2020[86]). Evidence from New Brunswick (Canada) shows that this is possible by anchoring the public education system in the commitment that all students can succeed, which is enhanced by teachers seeking out and using effective instructional strategies and sustained by investments in professional learning and capacity building (Forlin et al., 2011[87]). In 2013, New Brunswick (Canada) introduced the Policy 322 on Inclusive Education, a legally-binding policy at the province level that sets out the requirements of an inclusive education

system for all public schools, overseen by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The policy lays out detailed standards for inclusion, including requirements for all school personnel to ensure that each student can fully participate in a common learning environment by applying student-centred learning and providing accommodations, with variations occurring only under strictly limited conditions. Segregated and alternative education programmes for students enrolled from pre-primary to Grade eight (ISCED 3) are prohibited (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013[88]).

Box 3.2. The 2018 law on inclusive education in Portugal

With its 2018 law on inclusive education and accompanying policy measures, Portugal has made a clear commitment to developing an inclusive education system, supporting equity and inclusion for all learners. The Decree Law No. 54/2018 states that "schools shall include in their guidance documents the lines of action to create a school culture where everyone finds opportunities to learn and the conditions to fully realise this right, responding to the needs of each pupil, valuing diversity and promoting equity and non-discrimination in accessing the curriculum and the progression in the educational system."

The law on inclusive education establishes the principles and regulations that ensure inclusion as a process, according to which the education system must adapt to respond to the diversity of needs and capabilities of each student, through increased participation in the learning processes and educational community. It reflects a shift away from the rationale that it is necessary to categorise to intervene. Rather, it seeks to ensure that all learners attain the goals delineated in a *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*, through accommodations and differentiated learning that allow each learner to progress in the curriculum in a way that ensures their educational success.

Accordingly, Portugal's new law on inclusive education does not require students to have a formal diagnosis to receive specific support. Furthermore, the new law abandons the categorisation of learners, including the categories associated with special education needs. As such, it removes segregation and discrimination based on diagnostic or clinical labels and special legislation frameworks for learners with special needs from the educational system. Moreover, the law removes the restricted concept of "support measures for learners with special education needs". Rather, it takes a broader view based on a whole school approach that considers multiple dimensions and the interactions between them.

Source: Ministry of Education of Portugal (2018[89]), *Decree 54/2018*, http://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EEspecial/dl_54_2018.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Overall, it would be helpful to link the definition of inclusion to the overall vision (*Gesamtvision Bildung*), the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) and the system's mission statement (*Leitbild*) to ensure coherence across the education system and its approach to inclusive education. It will also be important to ensure a coherent understanding of and approach to inclusive education in schools. Several projects in the German-speaking Community could provide positive examples in this process. This includes the Joint Primary School in Bütgenbach, where a mainstream school and a special school were merged on a campus with a joint management team and where students with and without SEN attend the same classes, making use of team teaching (PDG, 2021[80]). Another example is the Robert Schuman Institute in Eupen, where students with SEN, newcomer students and other diverse students are taught together (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Good examples of local practices in the German-speaking Community of Belgium to support inclusion that could be built upon

The German-speaking Community of Belgium offers some good practices of schools implementing a coherent approach to inclusion. One example is the Joint Primary School in Bütgenbach (*Gemeinsame Grundschule Bütgenbach*), which united the former municipal school and the special school in one school building under two providers. The school is led by two principals, one from the Community and one from the ZFP, and receives resources from both networks. It offers joint teaching, which is ensured by team teaching (double staffing of classes). The school currently has about 190 pre-primary and primary students, about 24 of whom have recognised special education needs (and receive high-threshold support). Other students can receive low-threshold support. One of the pre-primary classes (the "rainbow class") caters specifically to the needs of children with multiple disabilities or autism. Teachers use a variety of strategies (including differentiation) to respond to the needs of all students and they are supported by a team of speech therapists, special education needs teachers, therapists and a paramedical co-ordinator. The ZFP provides additional support to the teachers and the school. The school has a farm with horses for riding therapy and different therapy rooms. It considers itself an inclusion-oriented school as it is on the way of becoming an inclusive school.

Another positive example of inclusive practices in the German-speaking Community is the Robert Schuman Institute in Eupen, which is the largest secondary school with around 860 students. It offers 14 different fields of study in technical and vocational education and offers students a pathway to obtaining the Abitur (final year examination) and progressing to higher education. The school incorporates students with special education needs as well as newcomer students and students with an immigrant background. The school also incorporates a centre for part-time vocational education (TZU). Over 200 full- and part-time teachers strive to support all students with their different abilities to reach their potential (Robert Schuman Institute, 2021[90]). Teachers apply differentiation to respond to the needs of all students and engage in a project on diversity in classrooms. Teachers are supported internally by a team of educators, psychologists and therapists, and externally through the ZFP and youth workers. Students with SEN are taught by a team of two teachers, one from the Robert Schuman Institute and one from the ZFP. Newcomer students who do not speak the language of instruction are placed in newcomer class where they remain one to two years in order to learn German and receive targeted support. Once they reach a certain level of German, they are integrated into mainstream classes but are still supported in their language learning.

Source: Authors' interviews.

Adopting a broader definition of inclusion could support the learning of students with special education needs in mainstream schools, but it would also help to provide a welcoming environment for students from other diverse backgrounds, such as newcomer and immigrant students, gifted students and students from different socio-economic backgrounds. This would entail working towards a cultural change driven by clear goals for inclusion that are reflected in curricula and learning progressions, in the continuing professional learning of teachers and in the staff mix in schools.

Streamline components of the education system that provide support to diverse student groups

To help place students at the centre of learning, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to streamlining the provision of support for diverse student groups. As mentioned above, the process for students that need extra resources or teaching to apply for support is quite bureaucratic and rigid, which can cause delays in the time it takes for students to get the support they need. Measures to streamline this process

could improve the equity and inclusivity of the system. First, schools should be able to draw on different types of support for each student including not only specialised teachers or teaching assistants, but also non-teaching staff. Moreover, flexibility in responding to students' specific needs should be supported by the provision of a pool of materials, accommodations or modifications that can address each student's needs.

Secondly, since the procedure for demanding support for a student with SEN is lengthy and bureaucratic, greater flexibility in the system could reduce the waiting time for students to receive the necessary support. For instance, the Citizens' Council (2021[80]) recommended that the deadline of 1 February for requesting support be made more flexible. Either more deadlines should be offered throughout the year in order to shorten students' waiting time or students should be able to receive support while they are waiting for an official decision to be taken. Furthermore, the support should not be rigidly guided by a fixed number of hours per student, which are currently defined by Kaleido Ostbelgien. Instead, specialised support teachers should be able to adapt the work and time needed for each student based on more flexible arrangements and their own evaluation of the child's needs. The outputs from the meetings in the Citizens' Council (2021[80]) also suggested that the core competence of the ZFP should be shifted to advising and supporting mainstream schools and parents, rather than being involved in the actual schooling of children with special education needs. This would focus their competences and expertise on guiding and supporting practitioners, while leaving the classroom choices and activities to teachers and schools, which can more flexibly respond on a case-to-case basis.

Concerning students with an immigrant background and specifically newcomer students, the language support system should be made more flexible and adapted to students' needs. In particular, the language support programme should be more easily extendable beyond two years where necessary, as could be the case for late newcomer students. Although, starting with the school year 2021/22, the length of language programmes can be exceptionally extended by a maximum of one year at the secondary level, schools, teachers and families should be made aware of this option to ensure that students who require it can take advantage of it. Moreover, the Community should ensure that the exceptionality clause to the extension does not become too restrictive for students needing extra support. At the same time, students should not remain in separate settings for longer than necessary and should be mainstreamed into regular classes as soon as possible in order to avoid their exclusion.

The Community should thus strike a balance between the need to support students' language learning and that of integrating them into mainstream education to ensure that they participate in learning of other subjects, develop social skills and take part in the daily life of their peers in mainstream classes. This could be achieved by supporting students' additional language learning needs even after they have been integrated into mainstream classes, which would require teachers to be trained in supporting students with limited proficiency in the language of instruction. Some countries have pursued this goal by adopting practices such as language-sensitive teaching, which is based on the notion that "all teachers are language teachers" and that children's language skills should be developed in all school subjects (European Commission/Ecorys, 2018[91]). In Austria, for instance, the Ministry of Education's Language Competency Centre set up an online platform with information and tools to support teachers with the subject-oriented language development of students across the curriculum (Sprachenkompetenzzentrum (The language competency centre), 2021[92]).

Lastly, language support should play a more prominent role in the inclusion of younger students at the pre-primary level. At the moment, language support at this level is only offered in classes with at least 40% of children who do not speak the language of instruction, while others are encouraged to learn the language through play. While younger children do learn through play as well as interactions with other children and with pre-school teachers, structured language learning could support their development at a key age. Studies show that children's development of receptive language and speech production is at its highest between the ages of 0 and 2. Young children are thus learning from their environments well before they enter school and set the foundation for future learning as their brains develop. Investing in children's development at an early age can therefore produce significant gains in language learning (National Research Council; Institute of Medicine, 2000[93]; Shuey and Kankaraš, 2018[94]). The development of higher cognitive functions similarly peaks at an early age but it continues for a longer time until around age 16 to 18.

Given the critical role of the early years for language development, it is important that young children are exposed to environments where the language of the country of destination is spoken, as is the case in pre-primary education. If newcomer children are only exposed to the language of instruction once they turn five and enter compulsory education (or later than that), it may be necessary to provide them with additional support for their language learning. Similarly, if a significant share of students in pre-primary education groups are non-native speakers, it may be necessary to help their language learning progress as they may not otherwise be sufficiently exposed to the language of instruction. These interventions may benefit not only immigrant students, but also students from disadvantaged backgrounds that may be lagging behind in their language learning. Box 3.4 describes several countries that provide language learning support for children in pre-primary education.

Box 3.4. Language learning support for children in pre-primary education

Across OECD countries, some education systems have implemented language support for students in pre-primary education, often targeting immigrant or disadvantaged students, who may need additional support to improve their language skills before accessing primary education.

Pre-primary language learning support in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to receive language-development support. These children can participate in targeted programmes at the pre-primary level (*vooren vroegschoolse educaties*) that provide support before and during the first years of school. All young children (age 2.5 to 4) who are part of this programme receive 10 hours of language development per week. For the rest of the day, the children attend the same early childhood and education programme as their non-targeted peers. Findings from the Pre-COOL (*cohortonderzoek onderwijsloopbanen*) national cohort study show that this approach is effective (OECD, 2018[10]; Leseman and al., 2017[95]).

Pre-primary language learning support in Germany

Germany uses a screening processes to identify pre-school children in need of additional language support, which has been introduced in the majority of the federal states. These assessments are usually implemented 12 to 24 months before children's transition to school. Based on the assessments, the most common practice to improve children's skills in German is the child-oriented "language education embedded into daily routines" (*alltagsintegrierte Sprachliche Bildung*). This seeks to integrate language education into everyday life and apply it to typical daily situations (such as meals, personal hygiene, pick-up and drop times, etc.) as well as planned and free play, and educational situations inside and outside the day-care centres (such as projects, excursions, joint activities and events, etc.). This approach can be aimed at the entire group of children, smaller groups or, if necessary, individual children. Such high-quality, language education support requires pedagogical specialists with specialised knowledge, practical knowledge and skills (especially related to interaction and conversation strategies, observation and analysis) (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Ministry for Family, Pensioners, Women and Youth, 2021[96]; OECD, 2017[97]).

Sources: OECD (2017[97]), *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en; OECD (2018[10]), *The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors that Shape Well-being*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264292093-en.

Strengthen differentiated teaching and student learning

Adapting teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of all students in the classroom, for example through differentiation, is at the core of inclusive education systems. Differentiation or differentiated instruction is defined as "an approach to teaching that involves offering several different learning experiences and proactively addressing students' varied needs to maximise learning opportunities for each student in the classroom. It requires teachers to be flexible in their approach and adjust the curriculum and presentation of information to learners of different abilities" (UNESCO, n.d.[98]).

Systematic differentiated instruction based on a diagnosis of learning levels could support the German-speaking Community in engaging all students and ensuring that teachers respond to different needs and learning styles. Differentiated instruction is particularly important to support the learning and well-being of gifted students, and to respond adequately to the needs and learning styles of students with special education needs (Brussino, 2021[72]). For instance, to promote the learning of students with learning disabilities or mental disorders, it is important that teachers are adequately prepared to incorporate behavioural interventions and practices (Mezzanotte, 2020[4]).These include the positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviour (for instance, providing positive feedback and encouragement more frequently than negative feedback), generalised behavioural intervention techniques (for example, allowing for sufficient opportunities for movement) and behavioural prompts (such as visual cues in the classroom or on the desk (Mezzanotte, 2020[4])). Differentiated instruction can also play an important role for the learning of immigrant students since it takes into consideration their proficiency in the host country language and makes learning contents comprehensible to them (Fairbairn and Jones-Vo, 2010[99]).

Several OECD school systems have taken steps to make differentiation more systematic, which could provide lessons for the German-speaking Community. In New Brunswick, Canada, for example, "Policy 322" requires public schools and school districts to implement inclusive school leadership. This includes promoting adequate professional learning opportunities for teachers and school staff and supporting teachers and school staff in the implementation of inclusive practices, such as differentiation and the Universal Design for Learning.[12] Under Policy 322, principals should also ensure that all academic and behavioural interventions implemented within the school are evidence-based and aimed at supporting diverse students' needs and learning styles. Furthermore, the policy requires principals to foster school- and community-level partnerships to achieve the growth goals identified in each student's personalised learning plan (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013[100]). This example from New Brunswick shows how legislation could help strengthen measures to ensure that teaching practices are suited for all students and their individual needs. Notably, New Brunswick's school system appears to be highly successful in keeping students engaged and reports a drop-out rate of only 1.1% (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2019[101]). Applying differentiated instruction could help the German-speaking Community to place its students at the centre of learning and adapt is academic offer to move towards a broader understanding of inclusive education.

Provide (mandatory) modules on inclusive education in initial teacher education and continuing professional learning opportunities for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff

For inclusive and student-centred learning to succeed, teachers need to be prepared to teach diverse students in mainstream schools and use differentiated teaching practices to respond to each student's needs. Inclusion should also be linked to the competence profiles (*Kompetenzprofile)* of teachers. From initial teacher education to continuing professional learning, preparing teachers for inclusive teaching is key to develop inclusive classroom environments (Brussino, 2021[72]). As mentioned above, ITE is crucial to prepare prospective teachers for classroom diversity through activities that allow them to expand their frames of reference (OECD, 2010[75]).

Many countries provide teacher education institutions and ITE providers with standards, targets or competence frameworks to guide their initial teacher education programmes. Countries that explicitly recognise diversity and

inclusion among their ITE objectives often operationalise this goal through the development of competence frameworks (European Commission, 2017[102]). Some countries, including Portugal and Sweden use ITE to promote an understanding of diversity and inclusion among teachers that is based on a recognition of the individuality and heterogeneity of students' needs (European Commission, 2017[102]). Some systems require prospective teachers to demonstrate knowledge of inclusion (in the broad sense, beyond SEN) and diversity to obtain their degrees. For instance, prospective teachers in Australia need to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) to obtain their ITE qualification. The APST require teachers to show they possess a solid understanding of diversity and inclusion in the classroom and that they are prepared to address diverse students' needs and learning styles through differentiated instruction (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, n.d.[103]). The APST consist of seven standards, which teachers have to meet at different levels (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead), depending on their career stage and level of experience. Teachers have to provide evidence of meeting the standards in order to become a registered teacher or achieve a "highly accomplished" or "lead" certification. Some of the seven standards specifically concern the inclusion of diverse students, including students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and students with disabilities (i.e. SEN) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014[104]).

Diversity and inclusion can be promoted through ITE curricula using various strategies. These include dedicated courses, horizontally integrated approaches across disciplines, as well as hands-on activities that mix both theoretical and practical contents. In the United States, ITE programmes have increasingly enriched mainstream ITE curricula with courses related to diversity and inclusion, such as multicultural education and urban education, as well as practical, community-based activities in diverse school settings (Yuan, 2017[105]; Mule, 2010[106]). Moreover, hands-on practical experience in ITE is key to preparing prospective teachers for classroom diversity, as it allows prospective teachers to become familiar with classroom dynamics, connect pedagogical theories to classroom practices and anticipate the challenges that they might encounter during their first years of teaching. An example of this practice is the Stanford Teacher Education Programme (STEP) in the United States, a year-long teacher education programme, which prepares prospective primary and secondary school teachers committed to values of social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion (Brussino, 2021[72]). The STEP programme prepares teachers through year-long placements in local schools, followed and supported by mentors and personal advisors (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2020[107]).

The German-speaking Community should require inclusive education practices to be included both in ITE and continuing professional learning (CPL) activities for in-service teachers. A Citizens' Council in the German-speaking Community has made multiple recommendations on how to expand teacher's initial education and in-service training in order to strengthen teachers' preparation in the area of special education needs (PDG, 2021[80]). Integrating topics related to students with SEN in ITE and introducing a corresponding internship period would help the education system strengthen the support it can provide to students with special education needs. However, the Community should aim to broaden these measures and implement them not only in relation to SEN but to address the inclusion of all student groups that may require teachers to undergo specific training and preparation, i.e. including students with an immigrant background, gifted students or members of the LGBTQI+ community. ITE and CPL activities should therefore also cover topics such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, differentiation and beyond.

Aspiring teachers should be required to complete at least one internship in a special school, in an inclusive school or in a mainstream school with an inclusion teacher, either in the Community or abroad. The offer of the *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* could also be expanded to offer a degree with a focus not only on special education teaching but more broadly on inclusive education. Moreover, as differentiated teaching can be a key to achieving more inclusive education systems, modules on differentiation between students and between education levels should be a compulsory element of teachers' studies. Corresponding continuing professional learning opportunities should be offered to allow in-service teachers to become familiar with these topics too.

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium also considered training school leaders in the areas of inclusion and special needs education to enable them to better support teachers and other staff in their

schools (MDG, 2019[20]). These plans should be pursued since a strong culture of collaboration between school leaders, teachers and other teaching and non-teaching staff is critical to bring together the different competences necessary to address specific needs and provide students with a variety of alternative forms of support.

Collect disaggregated data and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices for inclusion

Promoting the monitoring and evaluation of all students' outcomes would be a key step in the German-speaking Community's efforts to achieve more equitable and inclusive schools. Developing indicators on inclusion can be a major driver of reforms since they can help to monitor progress towards the system's goals while also highlighting areas that require significant interventions. Indicators can thereby help school systems to translate their commitment to inclusive education into reforms. As described in Chapter 2, the development of indicators should be considered carefully and aligned with the system's goals in order to "measure what we value" as opposed to "valuing what we can measure" (Ainscow, 2005[108]). An interesting example on how to develop a framework to monitor the inclusiveness of education systems has been developed by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which is more extensively described in Box 3.5.

Box 3.5. Example of a framework for developing inclusive education indicators

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has developed a framework to help European countries with the implementation of inclusive education indicators, in particular in the area of participation. The Agency proposes following an input-process-output approach with five steps to identify indicators. The matrix in Table 3.5 illustrates the process described below.

1. Make an inventory of available data

This step takes into account all kind of sources of available data, including data from health and welfare systems. Relevant questions that can foster a dialogue among stakeholders at this stage include: "Do data collected by different agencies fit together?" and "How can it be ensured that data complements each other?" The data should be organised in a matrix that considers inputs, process and outcomes on one axis, while considering different levels of the system (classes, schools, system) on the other axis.

2. Identify gaps in available data

Gaps have to be identified using the matrix. What additional data and what efforts are required to fill the gaps? If different countries face the same problem, they should think together of how to overcome those obstacles.

3. Check whether available data can be aggregated and disaggregated across levels

To fill gaps, it may be possible to aggregate or disaggregate data available vertically across cells.

4. Check whether available data can be monitored across the process of education

Data should be able to be monitored over time. Inputs, processes and outcomes should also be linked to better understand why outcomes change if they do.

5. Check whether available data respects the interests of the persons behind the data

Data need to be accessible. If the data stem from information relating to students, teachers and parents, then it should be aimed at benefitting those children and their families.

Table 3.5. Example: Matrix to organise information on participation

		Input	Process of Education			Outcome
Participatory policies and practices		Admission	Assessment/Analysis	Planning, Allocation	Instruction, Intervention, Teaching, School-related activities	Evaluation and Transition
Systems of education	Education system					
	School					
	Classroom					
Participatory relationships as mediators between policies/practices and individuals						
Participation of individuals						

Sources: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2011[109]), *Participation in Inclusive Education – A Framework for Developing Indicators*; Cerna et al. (2021[3]), "Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework", *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 260, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/94ab68c6-en.

In addition to developing indicators to monitor their students' outcomes, the German-speaking Community should also formulate clear targets to be reached. This effort should involve not only the system level, but also the school and classroom level to support formative evaluation and generate sound evidence for any change in policy and practices. Moreover, collecting disaggregated data for diverse groups of students, such as students with SEN or with an immigrant background, would allow to monitoring their outcomes against those of their peers and evaluate the level of inclusiveness of the system.

Some countries have developed monitoring strategies focusing specifically on promoting students' well-being. New Zealand's Child and Youth Well-being Strategy, for example, includes indicators to measure progress on a range of outcomes, including "learning and developing", which support the Government in monitoring and improving its education sector. As part of this, New Zealand monitors not only participation and achievement in schools, but also developed indicators on social and self-management skills (Child Wellbeing & Poverty Reduction Group of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019[110]).

To strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its school system, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to consistently evaluate pilot projects, policies and programmes in the area of inclusive education. These evaluations should generate rigorous evidence to assess which interventions have proven effective in improving the system's equity and inclusiveness as well as the academic and well-being outcomes of its students. Consistent evaluations of pilot projects would allow to identify local policies or practices that can be scaled up and adapted to different schools or classes throughout the Community.

An interesting example of systematic evaluation practices is that of Austria, which monitors and evaluates policies through the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System (*Institut des Bundes für Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen*, IQS). The IQS is a subordinate agency of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) and supports it in the evidence-based steering and development of the Austrian school system. The IQS created the basis for an even more effective and practical use of the collected data and evidence for quality assurance processes in the Austrian school system. The methodological independence required for the objectivity, reliability and validity of the test instruments and the data collected is ensured by a scientific advisory board made up of experts from Germany and abroad (Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System, 2021[111]). In the area of equity and inclusion, the IQS developed a series of reports including a formative evaluation of the inclusive

model regions. The inclusive model regions project lasted from 2013 to 2019 and aimed to support and document the implementation of inclusion models and foster peer learning between regions that had moved towards greater inclusion – particularly concerning students with SEN – at different points in time. The reports provided an assessment of the status quo by relevant stakeholders, documented the implementation process of inclusion in three model regions, and provided implementation strategies related to specific challenges faced (Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System, 2019[112]).

Reform the school calendar and seize opportunities to reduce learning gaps

The school rhythm (*Schulrhythmus*) is an important element in the lives of students from early childhood to late adolescence. A reflection on how to optimise these rhythms concerns the well-being of children and young people but also provides opportunities to further strengthen the equity and overall performance of education systems (Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2018[113]). While a traditional school calendar consists of short breaks during the school year and a long summer break, a year-round school calendar distributes in-school days more evenly across year, providing more frequent but shorter breaks (Graves, 2011[69]). A 2015 study carried out by the Parents' Association of Catholic School Boards (UFAPEC) underlined the importance of considering the needs of children and adolescents when re-structuring school rhythms to promote memorisation and learning.

In the European Union, the length and organisation of the school calendar varies significantly across countries. According to Eurydice data, students in Europe receive between 165 and 200 days of instruction over the course of the school year. In around half of the 37 countries/regions examined, the year has between 170 and 180 school days (ISCED 1, 2 and 3) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021[114])

Based on system-level indicators collected by the OECD INES network, teaching is generally suspended during a long break at the end of the school year, which lasts from 5 weeks in Switzerland and Australia to 13 weeks in Latvia, Lithuania and Turkey (for lower secondary education). In addition, the regular teaching schedule is interrupted by two to five shorter breaks over the course of the school year, usually lasting one or two weeks (OECD, 2019, pp. 361, Figure D1.a[115]). Correspondingly, the annual weeks without teaching in OECD countries range from 17 weeks or more in Estonia, Ireland (ISCED 2/3), Latvia and Lithuania (ISCED 1) to 12 weeks or less in Australia (ISCED 2/3), Colombia, Germany, Mexico (ISCED 1/2) and the Netherlands (ISCED 1) (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[116]).

There are several examples of countries that have reformed their school calendars over the years. Most recently, the Government of the French Community of Belgium has announced that it will revise the rhythm of the school year. The reform, which is to come into force with the school year 2022/23, foresees that the school year will be divided into alternating periods of seven weeks of lessons and two weeks of holidays (known as “2/7”). The school year would thus start five days earlier in the month of August and end five days later than usual in the month of July. In addition, the All Saints' and Carnival holidays would be extended by one week each.

Distributing school breaks more evenly across the academic calendar generally aims to foster students’ well-being as well as to improve the academic outcomes of vulnerable students. Shortening the summer break has sometimes been proposed as an effective means to tackle the relative or absolute learning loss that some students experience during longer breaks in the school calendar (Cooper et al., 1996[70]; Quinn et al., 2016[117]; Atteberry and McEachin, 2020[118]). International evidence shows that longer summer breaks can be a disadvantage for students from lower or vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds, compared to their advantaged peers. Summer learning is rooted in family and community influences, which widen the achievement gap across social lines, while schooling can offset their impact (Alexander, Entwisle and Olson, 2007[71]). During the summer, skills of children from advantaged socio-economic background continue to advance (albeit at a slower rate than during the school year) while the gains of children’s from more disadvantaged background are generally flat (Alexander, Entwisle and Olson, 2001[119]). This seasonal pattern of achievement gains implies that schooling plays an important compensatory role and raises the question whether policy solutions, including

calendar reforms and summer school offers, could play a role in support disadvantaged children's learning year-round.

A feasibility study commissioned by the French Community of Belgium in 2018 analysed the main advantages that a reorganisation of the school rhythm could bring, not only for students, but also for teachers, families and the economy (Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2018[113]). The authors argued that the change in the school rhythm could help to support the well-being of students and mitigate the learning losses that particularly disadvantaged students experience during longer summer breaks (Finnie et al., 2019[120]). In addition, they suggested that the reform could give time to teachers to engage in training activities during the recurring breaks and allow families to enjoy more quality time together.

At the same time, the authors argued that reforms of the school calendar would need to fulfil a range of conditions for their successful implementation (see Box 3.6). This includes the importance of offering alternative student activities during the breaks as well as carefully co-ordinating the school calendar with parents' working schedules (Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2018[113]). Without compensation, reducing the overall amount of school holidays may also lead to fatigue among both students and teachers and could reduce the attractiveness of working in schools. In addition, keeping schools open for a longer period over the course of the year is associated with an increase in both staff and operating costs (Radinger and Boeskens, 2021[121]).

Box 3.6. The school calendar reform of the French Community of Belgium

Key elements for the feasibility of a "2/7" reform of the academic calendar

In 2018, the French Community of Belgium's "Pact for Excellence in Teaching" (*Le Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence*) proposed, among other measures, to redefine the annual school rhythm in order to better address the physiological needs of students, to promote learning and to allow for the participation in extracurricular activities, sports, etc. The solution put forward was to divide the year into periods of 7 weeks of classes followed by two weeks of holidays and to adapt the summer holidays accordingly ("7/2" rhythm). As such a change would affect many sectors of society beyond education itself, the *Groupe Central* has asked for a feasibility study to be carried out. In this context, between January and June 2018, the Roi Baudouin Foundation investigated the degree and conditions of acceptability of the main groups of stakeholders potentially affected. The representatives of the stakeholders consulted were largely in favour of a "7/2" rhythm, the well-being and learning of the child being at the heart of their motivations.

However, these actors also put forward a series of concerns conditioning their support. These "conditions of acceptability" can be summarised in three main messages:

1. ***The reform of school rhythms cannot be done in isolation***

   The reform must be part of a larger, society-wide transformation process that incorporates other aspects of the education system that are related to this issue (e.g. the way in which assessment is carried out, the organisation across 'school' and 'extra-curricular' activities, weekly and daily rhythms, support for students in difficulty and the fight against dropping out of school, the planning of cultural and school trips, etc.).

2. ***The reform of the school rhythm cannot be undertaken without rethinking the extra-curricular offer (training courses, childcare, etc.)***

   Children are not equal when it comes to free time and the organisation of time outside school. Modifying school rhythms without making extracurricular provision a priority, particularly in terms of accessibility, would risk widening inequalities rather than closing them.

3. ***A reform of school rhythm cannot be achieved without an alignment and adaptation of other agendas***

   It is not feasible to change the rhythm of the school year if the rhythm of other areas based on the school calendar does not follow. A certain re-articulation of the different rhythms and agendas will therefore have to take place. This concerns in particular linkage with the calendars of tertiary education, the correlation with the organisation of family life and the labour market, and the alignment of school rhythms between linguistic communities as requested by families.

Source: Fondation Roi Baudouin (2018[113]), *Étude de faisabilité - Rythmes scolaires annuels 7-2.*

A 2020 evaluation of the state of the German-speaking Community's education system surveyed stakeholders about their views on the organisation of the school calendar. Among respondents, 56% stated that the current arrangement was adequate, while 34% considered it inappropriate, a large majority of whom called for the summer holidays to be shortened (Stahl-Rolf et al., 2020[15]).

For the successful implementation of a school calendar reform in the German-speaking Community it would be important to consider the needs of families carefully, including the availability of childcare and the calendar's compatibility with parents' jobs. A school calendar reform would need to be carefully prepared to investigate which impact the change would have on students, particularly on the most vulnerable, as well as their families and school personnel. It would be crucial to take into account the conditions discussed in Box 3.6, and in particular to offer alternative activities during the weeks of holidays that are accessible for all students, including the less advantaged, newcomers, etc. This offer could diminish the risk that students incur learning losses while ensuring that parents – and particularly mothers – do not have to compromise their working life and careers to care for their children during those weeks.

In France, for instance, students between the ages of 3 and 18 are offered cultural, artistic and sporting activities adapted to their age during the school breaks. The summer school break can be an opportunity for students who feel the need to consolidate their knowledge in order to be better prepared at the beginning of the school year. During the spring break of 2021, distance learning courses were offered at primary to secondary level, providing small groups of five or six students with two-hour teaching modules at a rate of three or four per week (Ministère de l'Education Nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2021[122]). Sports clubs were also open during the school breaks, allowing children and adults to practice individual outdoor activities. In order to counterbalance the impact of having to finance activities for children in less advantaged families, the French "Caisses d'allocations familiales" (Caf) grant their beneficiaries vouchers that can be used to finance children's leisure activities during school breaks (e.g. summer camps) (Service Publique, 2020[123]).

Nevertheless, there are clear benefits to shortening the summer breaks for the German-speaking Community. An alignment with the French Community, which is rearranging the school calendar in 2022, would benefit families with children in both systems who would otherwise face significant organisational challenges dealing with two different school calendars. In addition, the non-teaching time should be seen as opportunity to offer additional continuing professional learning opportunities for teachers and learning support staff, who could take advantage of this time to both rest and prepare their classes as well as to receive training in particular areas.

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Notes

[1] The decree's full title is "Decree on the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy to improve special education needs in mainstream and special schools and to support the support of students with impairments, adaptations or learning difficulties in mainstream and special schools [ZFP]".

[2] It should be considered that a relevant part of immigrant students in the Community emigrated from a German-speaking country, which entails different needs compared to other OECD countries.

[3] Article 61 concerns "special provisions for the support of gifted students" (*Besondere Bestimmungen über die* Hochbegabtenförderung).

[4] Kaleido is a para-statal public interest institution that promotes the healthy development of children and adolescents from age 0 to 20. Multidisciplinary teams composed of social assistants, psychologists, nurses, doctors and health promotion assistants are available to fulfil this wide-ranging mission. The services offered by Kaleido include counselling, guidance, project work and assessments. Kaleido has a head office as well as four service points that allow it to offer low-threshold support (Kaleido, 2021[124]).

[5] The 900 hours of lessons are given by integration teachers either in the classroom or in individual lessons or small groups. This high-threshold support is available for about 390 students.

[6] Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2021), *Time-out*, https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3529/6363_read-37748/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[7] https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/22448d98-2443-4d01-b95f-7e42341b1e88/Kostenbeteil.%20Ausser.%20Betreuung.pdf

[8] Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2021), *Familienportal - Hausaufgabenhilfe*, https://www.ostbelgienfamilie.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5917/10102_read-54896/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[9] Costs are 85.40€ per child and per week including 3 meals. Reduced rate: 50.30€ per child and per week including 3 meals. Reduced rate is charged for families with a household income of less than 1.800€ net (only with submission of salary certificate).

[10] Examples include the programme *Kultur macht Schule* (http://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3964/7104_read-41299/), the *Schulsportprogramm* (https://www.ostbelgiensport.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3388/5925_read-36721/), and a drama pedagogy project (*Theaterpädagogik*) run by AGORA and subsidised by the Education Minister.

[11] For the academic year 2021/22, the organisation of the school calendar is defined by the Government Decree of 11 February 2021 (*Erlass der Regierung vom 11. Februar 2021 zur Festlegung des Schulkalenders sowie des Kalenders für das akademische Jahr 2021-2022*), see https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2212/4397_read-31727/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[12] For more information on the Universal Design for Learning, see Brussino (2021[72]), "Building capacity for inclusive teaching: Policies and practices to prepare all teachers for diversity and inclusion", *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 256, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/57fe6a38-en.

4 Strengthening the quality of teaching, school leadership and learning environments

This chapter focuses on the teachers, teaching and school leadership in the German-speaking Community. It addresses the initial preparation and recruitment of teachers and school leaders, their continuing professional learning, working conditions and career development. It also looks at the school evaluation process, the capacity for school improvement and schools as learning organisations. The chapter identifies strengths and challenges related to these policy areas and concludes with policy options to address them.

Context and main features

Profile of the teaching workforce

As of 1 January 2021, 1 686 teachers worked in publicly funded schools of the German-speaking Community's three school networks (corresponding to 1 341 full-time-equivalent [FTE] positions). 12.9% of FTE teaching staff were employed at the pre-primary level, 31.4% at the primary level, 46.9% at the secondary level, and 8.7% in special education needs (SEN) schools. In 2021, the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU) counted 505 teachers and leaders, the Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW) counted 673 teachers and the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU) counted 657 teachers.[1]

Teachers are supported by 448 (255 FTE) support staff including administrative staff, teaching assistants, and para-medical staff working in special needs schools. Since 2017, there has been a slight increase in the total number of FTE positions in schools, in particular among administrative staff positions, which doubled during this period, and pedagogical support staff positions, which increased by 56%, compared to a 5.9% increase in the number of teacher positions. Given the relative stability in the number of students between 2017 and 2020 (-0.2%), the increase in staff numbers resulted in a modest decrease in the overall number of students per FTE teaching staff (-2.5% from 9.29 to 9.05) and a significant decrease in the number of students per FTE non-teaching staff (-27.7% from 62.5 to 45.2) over this period (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Trend in employment in schools, by type of staff, 2017-2021

Full-time equivalent staff in pre-primary, primary, secondary and special needs education.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Pedagogical support staff	120	120	137	159	145
Para-medical staff	44	44	50	49	49
Socio-psychological staff	4	4	4	6	6
Administrative staff	27	27	44	55	55
Teaching staff	1 312	1 312	1 327	1 343	1 341
Ratio students / FTE teaching staff	9.29	9.27	9.14	9.05	-
Ratio students / FTE other staff	62.50	62.37	51.62	45.20	-

Source: Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

As in many OECD countries, the teaching profession in the German-speaking Community is highly feminised (see Table 4.2). In 2021, the proportion of female teachers and school leaders was 97.3% in pre-primary education, 89.5% in primary education and 77.3% in secondary education (MDG, 2022[1]). For comparison, the average proportion of female teaching staff across OECD countries was 96% at the pre-primary level, 82% in primary education, 67% in lower secondary education and 60% in upper secondary education in 2018 (OECD, 2020, p. Table D5.1[2]).

Table 4.2. Teachers and school leaders, by gender, age and type of education, 2021

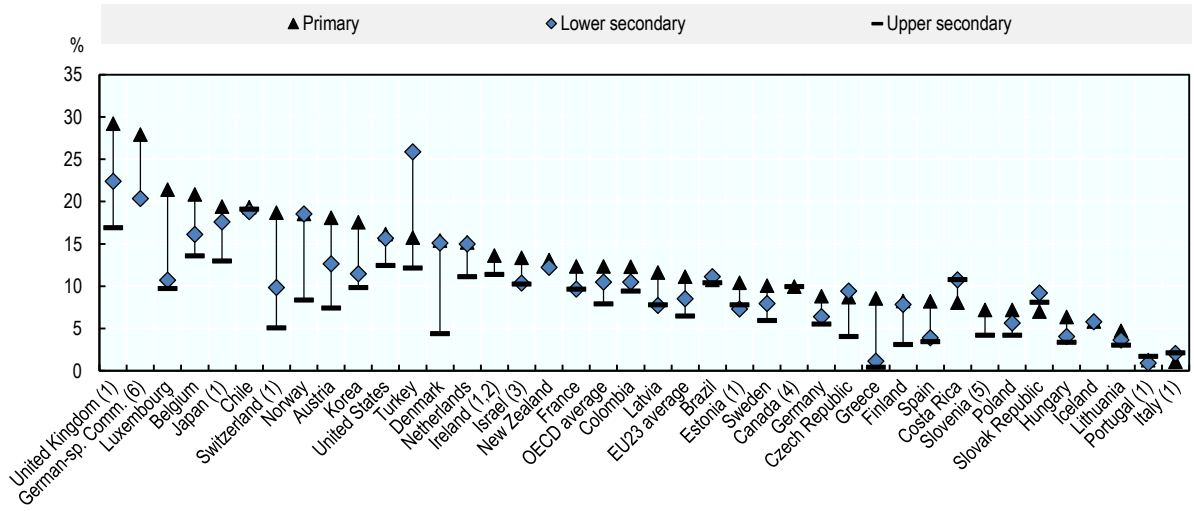
	Number of FTE teachers	Number of FTE support staff	Total number of all staff	% women	% aged below 30	% aged 50 and above
Pre-primary education	172.9	29.3	289	97.3	32.7	32.2
Primary education	421.3	30.0	662	89.5	27.9	26.5
Secondary education	629.3	92.7	875	77.3	20.3	32.2
Special education	117.2	103.4	180	82.4	24.0	28.1
Total	**629.3**	**255.4**	**2006**	**78.2**	**23.6**	**31.7**

Note: Gender and age refer to all staff. Support personnel includes administrative staff, teaching assistants, and para-medical staff. Total staff also includes maintenance staff and Kaleido employees.
Source: Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Teachers in the German-speaking Community are relatively young, compared to the OECD average. In 2021, the proportion of teachers and school leaders aged below 30 was 27.9% in primary education and 20.3% in secondary education. This is one of the highest shares across the OECD (see Figure 4.1), compared to an OECD average (incl. only teachers) of just 12% in primary, 10% in lower secondary, and 8% in upper secondary education. In 2021, 26.5% of teachers and school leaders were aged 50 years or above at the primary level and 32.2% at the secondary level, well below the OECD averages (among teachers) of 32%, 36% and 39% at the primary, lower and upper secondary levels respectively (OECD, 2020, p. Table D5.3[2]). The relatively young age of the teacher population could be explained by the overall growth of the teaching workforce and large cohorts of young teachers joining the profession, or by attrition among older teachers over the course of their careers.

Figure 4.1. Share of teachers below the age of 30, 2018

Share of teachers under 30 in public and private institutions, by level of education, based on head counts



1. Upper secondary includes programmes outside upper secondary level.
2. Public institutions only.
3. Public institutions only for upper secondary level.
4. Primary includes pre-primary education.
5. Primary includes lower secondary education.
6. Year of reference 2021. Includes school leaders. Lower secondary includes upper secondary.

Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of teachers below the age of 30 in primary education.

Source: Adapted from OECD (2020[2]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en, Figure D5.2.; Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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Based on the ministry's data, the annual number of teachers leaving the profession (for any reason, including retirement) has fluctuated between 89 and 104 (or about 5%-6.5% of the teaching staff) between 2017 and 2021. These attrition rates are comparable to those found in other OECD countries with available data, where on average 6.9% of pre-primary teachers, 5.3% of primary teachers and 7.4% of secondary teachers left the profession in 2016 (OECD, 2021, pp. 437, Table D7.2[3]). Attrition rates were slightly higher among younger teachers (30 years and below) and older teachers (50 years and older) – a pattern that can be found in most OECD countries with comparable data. Additional analyses would be needed to determine the factors that are driving attrition at different points of teachers' careers in the German-speaking Community (including the extent to which attrition among younger cohorts is explained by the inability to obtain permanent contracts and necessary qualifications, or teachers reorienting their careers after realising that the profession does not meet their expectations).

About a third of teachers (34.6%) at the secondary level (in schools attended by 15-year-olds) were employed on part-time contracts in 2018, based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) principal questionnaire in the German-speaking Community. This is a high proportion compared to the OECD average (13.4%) and the share of part-time teachers in the Flemish Community (23%), the French Community (21%), as well as countries like Germany (22%) or France (7%), but below the share in the Netherlands, where nearly half (48%) of teachers work part time (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.4[4]).

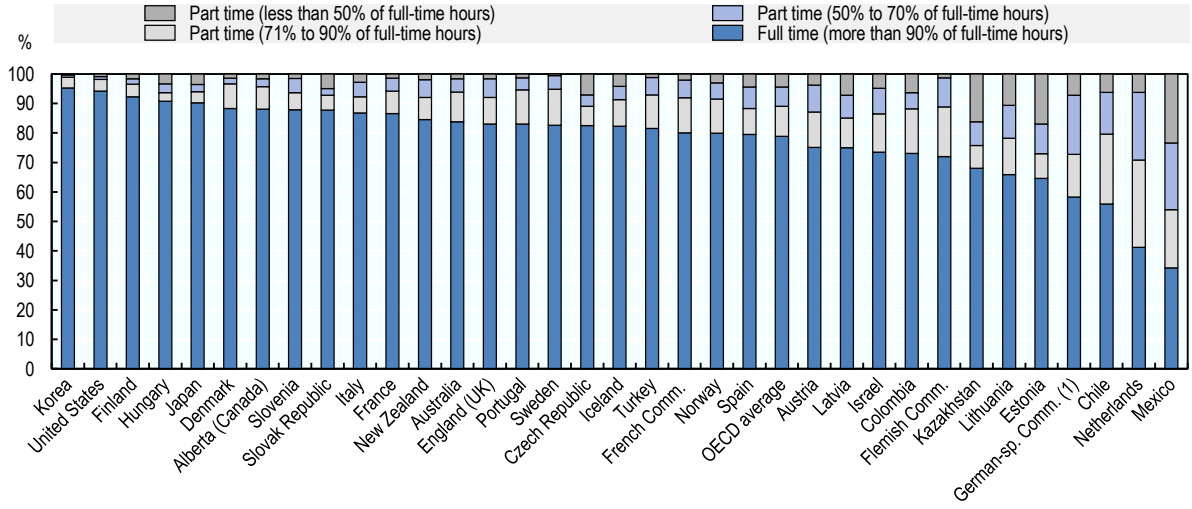
According to the German-speaking Community's administrative data, the proportion of teachers and school leaders in part-time employment was even higher, amounting to 51.8% in special needs schools, 50.5%

at the pre-primary level, 54.5% at the primary level and 58.2% at the secondary level in 2018.[2] As can be seen in Figure 4.2, this is significantly above the OECD average of 21% reported by lower secondary teachers in the OECD's latest TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) and comparable to the Netherlands (58.8%), which reported the largest share of teachers in part-time work among European jurisdictions (OECD, 2019, p. 222[5]). The demographic profile of the German-speaking Community's teaching profession, with its high proportion of younger teachers and women, may contribute to the elevated share of part-time teachers. In most OECD countries, part-time work is more common among female teachers and, in many cases, more frequently observed among early career teachers and senior teachers, although these patterns vary across countries and are shaped by different systems' policies and regulations (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021, p. 22 f.[6]).

Between 2017 and 2021, the share of teachers and leaders working part-time in the German-speaking Community has risen slightly across levels of education and the average staff contract was reduced from 82% to 79% of a full-time position over this period. This development may be driven by teachers choosing to reduce their hours or by teachers' inability to obtain full-time positions (particularly at the start of their careers). Further analyses would be needed to disentangle these factors.

Figure 4.2. Part-time and full-time work among lower secondary teachers, 2018

Percentage of lower secondary teachers employed full-time and part-time (taking into account all their current teaching jobs, based on teacher reports)



1. Includes school leaders and upper secondary level. Based on administrative data, rather than teachers' self reports.
Note: Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers working full-time.
Sources: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and OECD (2020[7]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en, Tables II.3.7 and II.3.10; Figure adapted from OECD (2019[5]), *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7aaf050-en.

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Teachers' initial preparation and qualifications

Teaching in schools of the German-speaking Community requires a teaching qualification (*Lehrbefähigung*), which can be obtained either through the completion of initial teacher education or (at the secondary level) through alternative pathways aimed at second-career teachers. The recognised qualifications for teaching staff vary across levels and types of education as well as the three school

networks. Schools of all three networks recognise the qualifications laid out by the decree governing teachers' status in the GUW network[3] (*erforderliche Befähigungsnachweise*). However, teachers in the OSU network[4] and the FSU network[5] are governed by separate service codes (*Dienstrecht*) that recognise additional qualifications (*als ausreichend erarchtete Befähigungsnachweise*) as sufficient and equivalent to the GUW's minimum qualifications, allowing them to draw on a larger pool of applicants (see below):

- **Pre-primary and primary education teachers** are generally required to have completed a bachelor's degree in teacher education for the relevant level. The 3-year full-time programmes (BA *Lehramt Kindergarten* and BA *Lehramt Primarschule*) comprise 180 ECTS points and are offered by the *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (AHS), the Community's higher education institution. Both courses include multiple weeks of teaching practicums in each of the three years. Schools of the OSU and FSU networks also recognise the certificate for approved lower-secondary school teachers (*Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire inférieur*, AESI) as an equivalent qualification for teaching in primary schools.
- **Lower secondary education teachers** need an AESI (*Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire inférieur*) teaching certificate or an equivalent qualification. The AESI is a bachelor's level qualification obtained through a 3-year programme that combines a pedagogical and subject-specific content in one to three subjects. AESI are not offered in the German-speaking Community, but can be obtained at one of the *Hautes Écoles* of the French Community.
- **Upper secondary education teachers** in the GUW network need an AESS (*Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur*) certificate of the subject they teach or an equivalent qualification. The AESS can be obtained as part of a two-year master's programme in teaching (*master à finalité didactique*) or through one year of pedagogical studies (two years, if part-time) corresponding to 30 ECTS, following the completion of another master's programme. Like the AESI, the AESS is not offered within the German-speaking Community and most teachers obtain it in the French Community.[6] Schools of the FSU network recognise any AESS certificate as a sufficient qualification, regardless of the subject taught.
- **Teachers of secondary technical and vocational subjects** for which there are no full-time qualification programmes can complete a short courses offered by the AHS to obtain a CAP (*Certificat d'aptitudes pédagogiques*) (15 ECTS). These courses are usually pursued part-time over the course of two years while teachers work at the school, also by teachers who do not yet fulfil the necessary requirements for their positions (see below).

There are plans to reform the initial education of primary and pre-primary teachers in the German-speaking Community and adapt it to the evolving demands of the teaching profession. The reform process is led by the AHS and included the development of a new competency profile (*Kompetenzprofil*), laying down what is expected of successful teachers (Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, 2020[8]; AHS, 2021[9]). The new competency profile is building on the seven competency pillars (*Kompetenzsäulen*)[7], which had been developed after the AHS' foundation in 2005/06, and entered into force with the 2021/22 academic year.[8] Although primarily geared to guide the design of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, the competency profile can also to guide teachers' induction and their continuing professional learning, akin to the standards for teacher education used in Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2004[10]). Based on the revised competency profile, the AHS is planning to develop proposals for the reform of initial teacher education programmes over the course of the 2021/22 school year. One of the reforms under discussion is the extension of the duration of the BA primary education programmes (MDG, 2022[1]). While there is significant variation across OECD countries, ITE programmes in the German-speaking Community are short in comparison. In 2013, the median duration of ITE programmes in OECD and partner countries was 4 years at the pre-primary and primary level, 4.75 years at the lower secondary level and 5 years at the upper secondary level. ITE programmes were shorter than 4 years in 15 of 35 countries at the pre-primary level and in only 5 of 35 countries at the primary level (OECD, 2014, pp. 499, Chart D6.2[11]).

Access to initial teacher education programmes

Access to the pre-primary and primary teacher education programmes at the AHS is conditional on having obtained a certificate of upper secondary education and passing a three-stage admissions process. The first stage is a non-selective online self-exploration tool based on the Career Counselling for Teachers (CCT) platform. It serves to inform the applicant, clarify their motivation and ensure that the teacher education programme and the teaching profession are the right choice for them. The second stage consists of a 3-hour online written examination testing cognitive and verbal reasoning skills. Candidates who successfully passed the written exam proceed to the third stage, which consists of an interview to assess candidates' motivation, communication skills and their ability to analyse and respond to situations in a school environment.[9]

Alternative pathways into the profession

There are several ways to enter the teaching career through alternative pathways in the German-speaking Community. Positions for roles for which there is a recognised staff shortage (i.e. if no qualified candidates could be found) can be filled by applicants who do not hold a teaching qualification. Teachers who do not fulfil the necessary requirements at the time of their recruitment can be employed under a "deviation system" (*Abweichungssystem*). At the secondary level, teachers who have served under the deviation system for at least 15 weeks each in three out of five consecutive schools years can be employed under a regular contract and start accumulating hours counting towards their permanent appointment, provided that they fulfil a number of additional criteria: This includes having obtained a teacher qualification (the CAP [15 ECTS] for vocational and technical courses / the CAP+ [30 ECTS] for general subjects) during this period, fulfilling the necessary language qualifications, and having obtained at least a "satisfactory" rating in their most recent evaluation.[10] This "deviation" pathway is taken by many of the secondary school teachers in the German-speaking Community.

By contrast, pre-primary and primary teachers employed through the deviation system need to complete a regular pre-primary or primary teaching diploma (rather than a CAP/CAP+), in order to obtain a regular contract and work towards a permanent appointment. Staff in the three networks are subject to different service codes (i.e. the regulations governing their working conditions, qualifications etc.) and schools in the OSU and FSU network are more generous in their recognition of qualifications, which allows them to draw on a larger pool of applicants and employ some teachers on a regular contracts who would have needed to join GUW schools under a *deviation* contract.

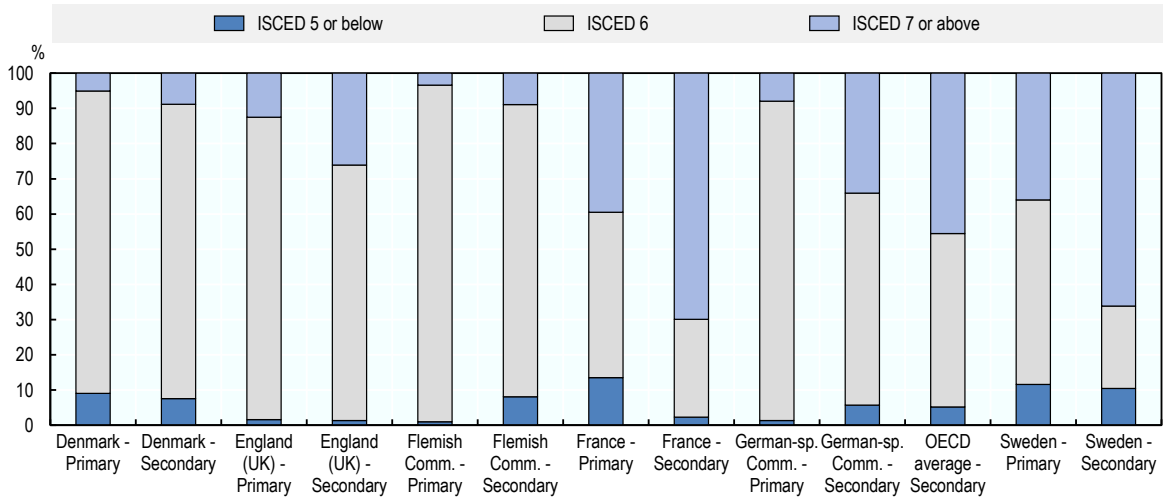
Teachers entering through alternative pathways are paid according to their highest qualification, independent of whether or not this qualification is a teaching qualification. In addition, in order to tackle teacher shortages, the German-speaking Community has provided financial incentives to attract second-career teachers and teachers from the neighbouring school systems. For example, teachers joining from another school system and those who worked in an EU public service or education-related non-profit can have their previous experience fully recognised and count towards their seniority. Those joining the vocational and technical teaching streams can do the same for up to 6 years of relevant professional experience (MDG, 2022[1]).

Although the share of staff entering the teaching profession through alternative pathways is not centrally monitored in the German-speaking Community, principals' responses to the PISA questionnaire suggest that they comprise a significant proportion of the staff. In 2018, secondary school leaders in the German-speaking Community reported that a remarkably low proportion of their teaching workforce is fully certified (just 52.9% - less than in any OECD jurisdiction outside of Latin America and considerably below the OECD average of 81.8%) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.6[4]). Many of the teachers that are not fully qualified are or were presumably employed under the "deviation" system but, as of yet, in 2021, there is no central oversight of the number of teachers employed without the required qualifications (monitoring is also complicated by the varying minimum qualifications across the three networks) (MDG, 2022[1]).

Overall, the educational attainment of teachers in the German-speaking Community is around the OECD average, although these is significant heterogeneity across countries in the minimum qualifications required to teach at a given level of education. According to national statistics, in 2018, 94.3% of the Community's lower secondary school teachers had at least a bachelor's degree and 34.1% had a master's degree, compared to 94.8% and 45.5% on average among lower secondary teachers across the OECD in TALIS 2018 (see Figure 4.3). In 2018, the share of lower secondary school teachers with a master's degree was significantly lower in, for example, the Flemish Community (9.0%), but higher in countries like Sweden (66.2%) and France (67.0%). Given the lower qualification requirements at the primary school level, just 8.0% of teachers in the German-speaking Community held a master's degree in 2018, which is comparable to the share in Denmark (5.0%), the Flemish Community (3.4%) and England (UK) (12.5%), but considerably below those in France (39.5%) and Sweden (36.0%). Between 2018 and 2021, the proportion of teachers in the German-speaking Community with a master's degree has remained stable at the primary level (8.0% vs. 8.3%) and increased slightly at the lower secondary level (from 34.1% to 36.9%). The proportion at the upper secondary level was significantly higher (61.7% in 2021), given that the AESS is a master's level qualification, while the AESI is a bachelor's level qualification.[11]

Figure 4.3. Teachers' educational attainment, primary and lower secondary education, 2018

Proportion of teachers by highest educational attainment, selected OECD jurisdictions



Note: Data for the German-speaking Community is based on teachers' pay grades rather than their own reports.
Sources: OECD (2019[12]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en, Tables I.4.8/9; Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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Supply, distribution and recruitment of teachers

Recruitment of teachers

As described above, each school in the German-speaking Community is granted a certain number of funded staff positions, based on a distribution formula. The school providers are responsible for recruiting and selecting pedagogical staff to fill the positions allocated through the distribution formula before the

start of the school year. Each of the three networks organises their recruitment process in the spring of each year (MDG, 2022[1]):

- **Community schools**: Teacher recruitment for schools of the GUW network is organised centrally by the ministry, acting as the networks' provider, in April of each year.
- **Private grant-aided schools**: Teacher recruitment for the FSU schools is organised centrally by the Secretariat of Catholic Education (*Sekretariat des Katholischen Unterrichtswesens*, SKU) on behalf of the Episcopal school provider.
- **Public grant-aided schools**: Teacher recruitment for schools of the OSU network is decentralised and organised by the school offices of the responsible municipality acting as their provider. The co-ordination service (*Koordinationsstelle*) of the OSU network provides information on the application process.

The public OSU and GUW networks fill open positions (and allocate teaching hours) using a points-based ranking system (*Klassierung*). Once teachers with permanent or open-ended fixed-term contracts at the school who wish to increase their teaching hours have had a chance to do so, the remaining positions and hours are offered to the highest-scoring applicants. First, the fully-qualified teachers are ranked (those holding the formal teaching qualifications [*Befähigungsnachweis]* and fulfilling additional requirements [*Bezeichnungsbedingungen*], notably the requisite language skills) and priority is given to those who have already completed their career entry period (*Berufseinstiegsphase*). The OSU and GUW use their own systems to allocate points, taking into account factors such as prior years of service with schools of the same provider, recent evaluation reports, additional qualifications, mastery of the language of instruction and completed professional development. Once the list is exhausted, candidates who do not fulfil all additional requirements (such as language certificates) are considered and teachers who do not hold the necessary teaching qualifications may be employed through the deviation system (MDG, 2022[1]). Teachers on temporary fixed-term contracts or employed through the deviation system need to reapply for their positions each year while those on temporary open-ended contracts reapply automatically. Should there be fewer positions than applicants, the lowest-ranked teachers at a school (starting with those in the lowest contract categories) may lose their position or teaching hours to higher-ranked applicants. The process does not take into account interviews, motivation letters or trial lessons and, as a consequence, give school leaders of OSU and GUW little scope to influence the selection of their teachers.

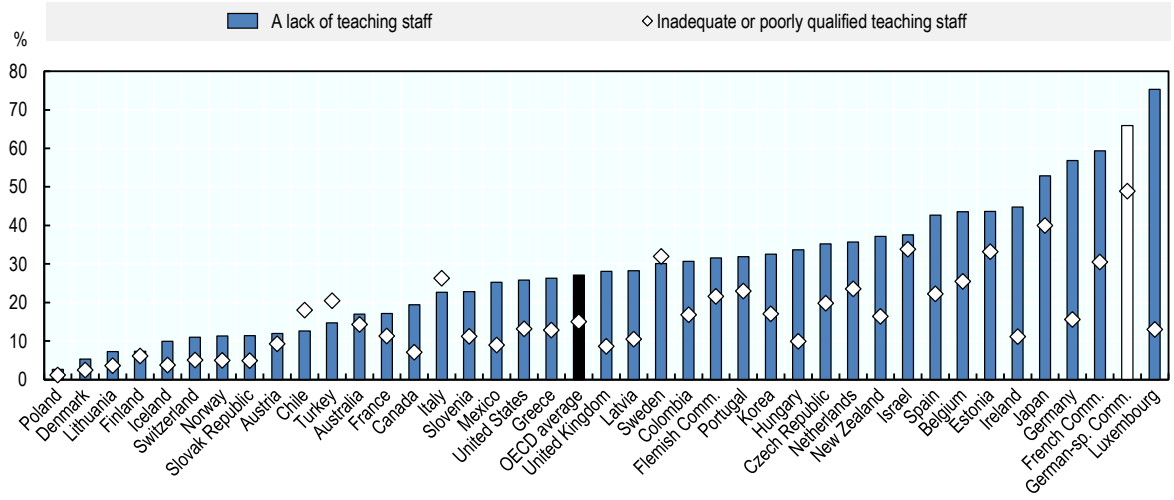
Schools of the FSU network enjoy greater autonomy in the recruitment of their teachers. Instead of the point-based ranking system used by the OSU and GUW networks, the FSU provider receives and distributes applications to school leaders who then organise interviews to select suitable candidates. Although school leaders prioritise candidates with open-ended contracts and those that successfully completed their career entry period, they can consider a wider range of factors to determine the candidates' fit than leaders of the OSU and GUW schools. Nevertheless, FSU schools follow the same qualification requirements as other schools and need to employ teachers with insufficient qualifications under the deviation system.

Teacher supply and shortages

Although detailed national data on teacher shortages is not available, school principals' reports suggest that the German-speaking Community faces considerable shortages of teaching staff, at least at the secondary education level. In the PISA 2018 survey, two thirds (66%) of 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal believed that teacher shortages hindered its capacity to provide instruction to some extent or a lot (see Figure 4.4). This was the highest proportion among any OECD jurisdiction apart from Luxembourg and significantly above the OECD average of 27.1% (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.2[4]). Likewise, almost half of the 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal reported that instruction was hindered by inadequate or poorly qualified teaching staff in 2018 – the highest proportion among participating OECD jurisdictions.

Figure 4.4. Perceived shortages of teaching staff, 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that teacher shortages hindered instruction



Source: OECD (2020[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.4.2 and V.B1.4.2.

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The decentralised staffing system of the German-speaking Community has so far prevented the ministry from systematically monitoring staff shortages and keeping track, for example, of unfilled vacancies, staff hired without requisite qualifications or missed classes due to a lack of substitute teachers. There is a perception, however, that the reliance on lateral entrants and teachers employed under a "deviation" provision due to a lack of sufficiently qualified staff has increased. Teacher shortages also tend to intensify over the course of the school year. According to the ministry, factors contributing to the reported teacher shortages include the insufficient number of students joining the profession, the increase in part-time work, frictions in the recruitment process (see below) as well as an increasing frequency and duration of medical leave among teachers in both primary and secondary schools (MDG, 2022[1]; Walther, 2020[13]). Another reported factor contributing to shortages – particularly in the southern municipalities of the Community – is the competition from schools in neighbouring Luxembourg, which offer considerably higher salaries (see Figure 4.7).

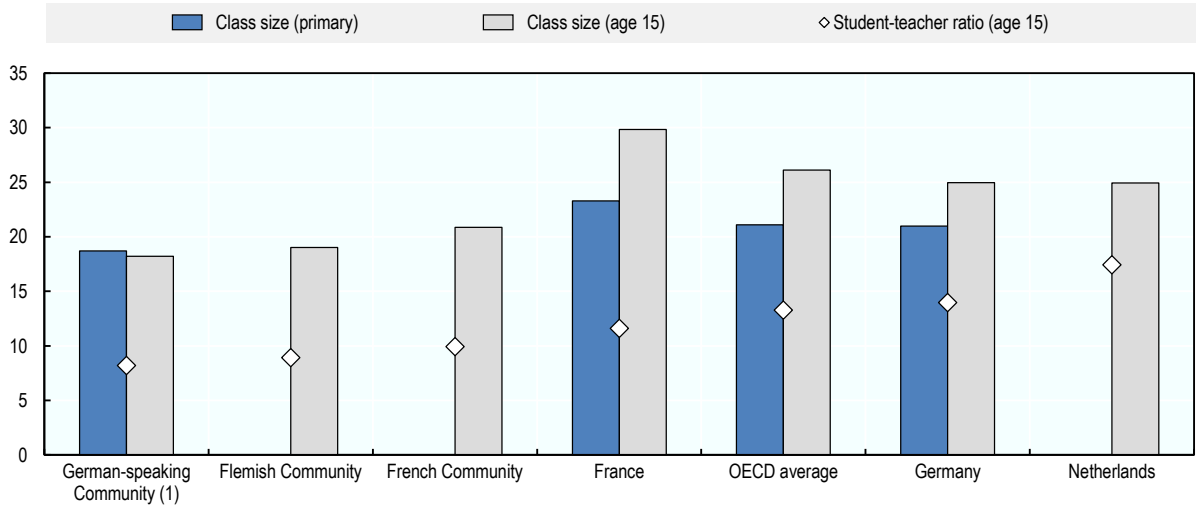
Experience from other OECD countries also shows that staff shortages rarely affect all schools to the same extent and are often concentrated in specific regions, school types of subject areas (OECD, 2019[5]). A 2016 survey of schools and providers suggested that secondary schools in the German-speaking Community experienced staff shortages of varying year-by-year intensity across all subjects. In 2021, the GUW network failed to find sufficient fully-qualified teachers in 41 subject areas (among them 10 general subjects, 7 vocational subjects and 13 technical subjects). Recruitment has proven particularly challenging in German and other languages, the natural sciences, mathematics, as well as business and economics (MDG, 2022[1]).

In order to evaluate staffing needs and potential shortages going forward, the ministry (Department for teaching personnel) is currently engaging in a prognostic exercise to forecast the demand for teachers until 2040 (*Lehrerbedarfsprognose*). The ministry hopes to use this system for continuous monitoring purposes going forward (including starting to systematically monitor teachers' activity status and staff

shortages brought on by long-term illness) to identify potential shortages going forward and to evaluate the effects of reforms (MDG, 2022[1]).

On average, schools in the German-speaking Community offer low student-to-teacher ratios and small class sizes. Based on ministry's information, the average class size in primary schools was 18.7 in 2020, slightly below the OECD average of 21 for primary schools in 2018 (OECD, 2020, pp. 383, Table D2.3[2]). The ministry does not collect information on the average class sizes at the pre-primary and secondary levels (MDG, 2022[1]), but based on PISA 2018 data, the average class size in year 10 (i.e. at the start of upper secondary education or the end of lower secondary education in the vocational track) was 18.2 – significantly smaller than the average across the OECD and neighbouring jurisdictions. As shown in Figure 4.5, there were, on average 8.2 students per teacher in the German-speaking Community in year 10, compared to 13.3 on average across the OECD. There are no central prescriptions or guidelines concerning the minimum or maximum class size in the Community though and class sizes in one of the schools visited by the OECD review team were reportedly closer to 30 students.

Figure 4.5. Average class size and student teacher ratios, 2018



1. Class size at the primary level based on national data for 2020.
Note: Class sizes at the primary level calculated based on the number of students and number of classes; Class sizes and student-teacher ratios at age 15 based on principals' reports about the modal grade (grade 10 in Belgium).
Sources: OECD (2020[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.4.11 and V.B2.4.10; OECD (2020[2]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en, Table D2.3.

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Induction and continuing professional learning in schools

Induction and mentoring

The *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (AHS) offers a programme to accompany new teachers during their first two years on the job. It is open to all new teachers, including those trained in other higher education institutions or entering the profession through alternative pathways. The programme involves regular group meetings organised by level of education (primary education, since 2019/20, secondary education and, since 2020/21, pre-primary education) with experienced teachers or pre-primary staff and psycho-pedagogical staff of the AHS. During the meetings, novice teachers deepen their psychological and

pedagogical-content knowledge and discuss problems that may arise at school and develop practical strategies to resolve them.[12]

Although some schools are implementing a mentoring system for new teachers, the practice is not systematic and widespread since schools need to use their allocated teacher resources to do so and few have spare capacity given the prevailing staff shortages in many schools (MDG, 2022[1]). Beyond the AHS' induction programme offered to all new teachers, there are no system-wide induction offers that address the specific needs of lateral entrants. Their level of support depends primarily on the school's internal practices and the voluntary initiative of their peers (MDG, 2022[1]).

Teachers' continuing professional learning

Since 2010, the AHS is responsible for the organisation and implementation of in-service training for teachers on behalf of the ministry (Eurydice, 2020[14]). The professional learning offer is based on a professional development "catalogue" that is developed each year by a professional development commission following the consultation of stakeholders and taking into account learning needs arising from political priorities and/or changing regulations (AHS, 2021[15]). The professional development commission is comprised of representatives of the different school networks (including network co-ordinators and school leaders), the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP), the Institute for Vocational Education and Training in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand*, IAWM), the external evaluation as well as the ministry and the AHS (MDG, 2022[1]).

Teachers' engage in professional learning both individually and in the context of school-wide training days:

- **School-based professional learning**: School leaders develop a professional learning plan in line with their school development plan and can choose three days a year to suspend instruction and dedicate to the professional learning of all teaching and support staff (*Konferenztage*). School leaders can choose whether to organise this professional learning with the AHS' pedagogical advisory service (*Fachberatung*), through the school development counsellors (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*) or an external provider. Participation in school-wide training days, if they are held, is mandatory for all teachers in the school. Since 2019, schools can request a fourth professional learning day, provided that it focuses on a topic that the minister has declared a priority for that year, such as heterogeneity, transversal competencies or language education (MDG, 2022[1]).
- **Individual professional learning**: Teachers can request to engage in additional training. If the school leadership approves teachers' requests, they are released from their teaching duties and replaced by a colleague for the duration of their training. For this, teachers may choose from the trainings offered by the AHS, which are mostly free of charge and open to all teachers of the German-speaking Community. They can also choose from the training offer of other Belgian professional learning institutes across the Communities (usually for subject-specific training at the secondary level) or of international providers in German-speaking systems in Germany, Austria or Switzerland. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have also increasingly taken advantage of online learning formats. Teachers can request central financial support for external training. The requests are evaluated and approved by the ministry, which may contribute up to 50% (up to a maximum value of EUR 247.89) per training. The remaining cost is covered by the school, if resources are available, or by teachers themselves.

Although the participation in further training is one of the duties defined in the 1998 Decree against which teachers are evaluated, there is no specific requirement or central guideline concerning the amount of individual professional learning that teachers in the German-speaking Community should engage in, nor is there a right to a given amount of training hours per year. Particularly in smaller primary schools teachers' participation in external training is sometimes constrained by the difficulty to find replacement teachers

(MDG, 2022[1]). Reports of secondary school principals also suggest that teachers' participation in continuing professional development activities was significantly below the OECD average (see further below) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.7[4]).

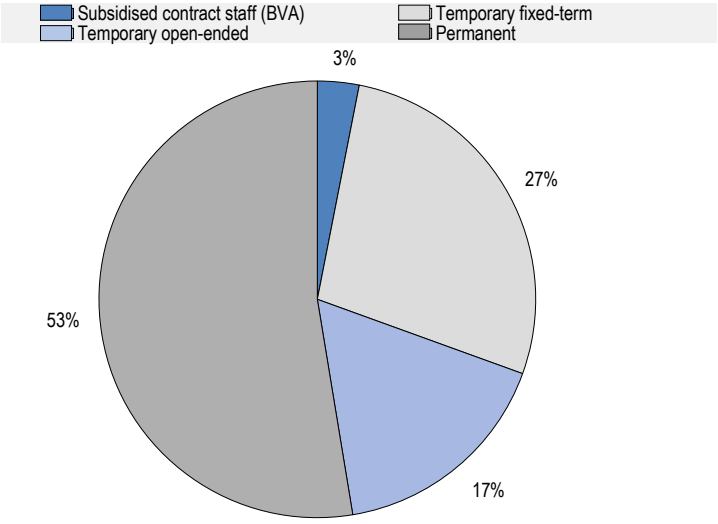
Schools of the grant-aided OSU and FSU networks are expected to pay for professional development out of the grant that they receive for pedagogical purposes (calculated based on the weighted number of students in the school). GUW schools cover expenditures on professional learning out of their main operating grant (MDG, 2022[1]). School leaders are free to decide which proportion of their funding to devote to teachers' professional development and to what extent they cover the cost of teachers' individual professional learning beyond the school-wide training days.

Teachers' career structure and remuneration

Contract status

Teachers in the German-speaking Community are employed under four types of contractual status: i) temporary fixed-term (*zeitweilig befristet*), ii) temporary open-ended (*zeitweilig unbefristet*), iii) permanent (*definitiv*), and iv) as subsidised contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA). In 2021, around half of all teachers and school leaders' contracts were permanent, 17% of contracts were temporary open-ended, 27% were temporary fixed-term and 3% were BVA contracts (see Figure 4.6). While teachers in the FSU are "employed" (*eingestellt*), teachers in the GUW and OSU networks are "designated" (*bezeichnet*) for temporary open-ended posts and "appointed" (*ernannt*) for permanent employment.

Figure 4.6. Contract status of teachers and leaders in the German-speaking Community, 2021



Note: On 1 January 2021, 279 staff members were employed under more than one contract modality, the sum therefore does not equal the total number of teaching and leadership staff (1879); Subsidised contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA) are teaching or non-teaching staff hired to provide additional support, particularly to students with special education needs (see Chapter 3 for more detail).
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

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Until the 2021/22 school year, all new teachers joining the profession were employed on fixed-term contracts lasting at most one year and needed to reapply for their positions at the end of each contract period. Once teachers completed at least 720 days of service within a school network (corresponding to

at least 3 years of full-time work), fulfilled all employment conditions and received at least a "satisfactory" rating in their latest evaluation, they were entitled to a temporary open-ended contract, provided that there was an open position to fill for at least one year from the 1st of September.[13] Teachers on temporary open-ended positions no longer need to apply for annual contract renewals, enjoy additional rights to vacation and greater job protection. Teachers who have cleared this step are automatically eligible for a permanent employment, which comes with even greater job security, as soon as a vacant position becomes available (MDG, 2022[1]).

With the start of the 2021/22 school year the contractual status of beginning teachers has been reformed in order to increase the attractiveness of the profession and reduce the administrative burden on recruiters. Under the new system, teachers who fulfil all formal employment criteria receive an open-ended contract from the moment they join the profession, provided that there is an open position to fill for at least one year. This absolves teachers from re-applying for their positions every year and provides them with greater job security during this career entry period (*Berufseinstiegsphase*).[14] As under the previous system, teachers are entitled to transition to the temporary open-ended contract (and, if a position is vacant, a permanent contract) after 720 days of service, obtaining additional rights related to contract termination and vacation in the process. Teachers can still be dismissed during this period if their performance is deemed "insufficient" in their evaluation (see below). The 720 days need to be completed under the same school provider (i.e. within a school network and, in case of the OSU schools, a single municipality). The period lasts at least 3 years and longer for part-time teachers. Applicants who do not fulfil all formal employment criteria when joining the profession and those who apply for a position lasting less than one school year will continue to be offered the previous one-year fixed-term contracts (MDG, 2022[1]).

Career structure

The teacher career structure in the German-speaking Community provides limited opportunities for professional advancement. There is no strongly developed career ladder for teachers with multiple stages of progressive responsibility and levels of competency. The only pathways for teachers to obtain formal promotions to positions with increased remuneration is to apply for a limited number of "selection positions" (*Auswahlämter*) or "promotion positions" (*Beförderungsämter*):

- **Selection positions** comprise a limited number of middle-leadership positions in secondary schools. Selection positions include the role of vice principal (*Unterdirektor*) in secondary schools of at least 550 students and the newly created part-time role of middle managers, of which there are two in secondary schools with less than 600 students and three in secondary schools with more than 600 students. Furthermore, vocational and technical secondary schools can nominate one or two workshop leaders (depending on the school's size), who support the quality of instruction and co-operation among teaching staff within their area. Special education schools at the secondary level usually have five department heads, a full-time co-ordinator of the school's *Time-Out* centre and a part-time para-medical co-ordinator – all of which are selection positions. There are no selection positions in pre-primary and primary schools.[15]
- **Promotion positions** are reserved for the school leaders of different school types as well as several roles in the school administration, including that of school inspectors and school development counsellors.

School providers advertise vacancies for selection and promotion positions and organise the recruitment process. The requirements and selection criteria for all positions have been revised over the past ten years, notably to permit permanent staff members to assume a selection position without losing their right to return to their previous role under the same conditions. Now, staff assume selection and promotion positions on open-ended fixed-term contracts and, for most roles, only transfer to a permanent contract after five years (staff also need to be 50 years or older and must have received at least a "satisfactory" rating in their last evaluation). The reform also permitted schools of the GUW network to consider a wider

range of criteria (beyond their seniority, formal qualifications and previous evaluation) when selecting candidates for selection of promotion positions, including their social skills, relevant prior experience and motivation. The reform also opened selection positions up to experienced external candidates who have not previously worked as teachers (MDG, 2022[1]).

Despite the lack of a strongly developed career ladder for teachers, schools may provide teachers with additional responsibilities internally in exchange for a reduction in their teaching hours instead of an increase in remuneration. For example, teachers over the age of 55 are eligible to reduce their teaching hours to 3/4 of the regular load in order to ease their transition towards retirement and may replace another quarter of their teaching hours to engage in supporting pedagogical tasks, such as mentoring new teachers, organising extracurricular activities, supporting newly arrived immigrant students (*erstankommende Schüler*, EAS) or – with the teacher's consent – take on administrative tasks. In the year 2020/21, 73 staff members were participating in this pre-retirement scheme, i.e. around 25% of those eligible (MDG, 2022[1]).

Since 2018/19, secondary schools can also nominate teachers to assume additional responsibilities as subject team leaders (*Fachteamleiter*) in mathematics, German language, French language and natural sciences or as subject advisors (*Fachberater*) in exchange for a slightly reduced teaching load (see section on middle managers and other school staff below).[16]

Remuneration

All teachers from pre-primary to upper secondary education, regardless of their school network and level of education, are paid directly by the German-speaking Community based on a common salary scale. Teachers' salary primarily depends on their seniority and their highest level of educational attainment. There are no extra allowances for difficult working conditions, specific subjects or responsibilities, teaching in areas of shortage, or for good performance. Since a 2009 reform, teachers are assigned to one of four salary grids (III, II, II+ or I) based exclusively on their highest level of attainment (see Table 4.3). Previously, teachers' assignment to salary grids was based on a combination of teachers' attainment, their role and the level at which they taught. This system was abolished with a view to ensure greater simplicity, transparency and reduce the scope for administrative errors. Staff on selection and promotion position are paid according to separate salary scales specific to those roles and independent of their highest level of attainment.

Teachers' salaries increase with seniority in increments of two years, reaching the maximum salary after 22 to 26 years of experience. Teachers who reached the end of their salary scale are entitled to an additional step at age 59. Previous experience in public service, education-related non-profits (or relevant professional experience in the case of technical and vocational teachers) can count towards their recognised years of service when they join the profession. In line with other public sector salaries, teachers' salaries are regularly increased by 2% to adjust for inflation based on a consumer price index (the most recent adjustments occurred in February 2020 and October 2021) (MDG, 2022[1]). Most teachers are remunerated based on Scale II+ (around 70% of teachers) or Scale I (around 25% of teachers).

Table 4.3. Teachers' salaries in the German-speaking Community, Sept 2020

Gross salaries by salary scale and years of experience for full-time staff, in EUR

	Scale III	Scale II	Scale II +	Scale I
Highest level of attainment	Below upper secondary	Upper secondary	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree
Starting salary	30 377	30 865	31 627	39 850
After 5 years	32 156	33 438	34 837	44 402
After 10 years	34 823	37 297	39 653	51 229
After 15 years	36 601	39 870	42 863	55 781
After 20 years	39 268	43 729	47 678	62 609
Maximum salary	41 936 (after 26 years)	46 302 (after 24 years)	50 889 (after 24 years)	64 885 (after 22 years)

Note: Excluding additional allowances (e.g. family allowances) and annual vacation and year-end premiums paid to all teachers; Salaries reported here are based on a consumer price index of 1.741 (January 2021), which has since been raised to 1.7758 in September 2021.
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

The Flemish and French Communities of Belgium remunerate their teachers based on a similar system of salary scales. Based on national data and calculation of the ministry, starting salaries for teachers with a bachelor's degree in the Germans-speaking Community are about 3-4% higher than in the French Community and 1-2% higher than in the Flemish Community throughout teachers' careers and progress at a similar rate, although teachers' end-career salaries are slightly lower in the German-speaking Community due to a smaller number of steps. The differences are similar, though slightly more pronounced for teachers with a master's degree (MDG, 2022[1]).

International comparisons between teachers' salaries in the German-speaking Community and those in other OECD jurisdictions should be treated with caution due to potential differences in reporting standards. Nevertheless, it appears as though, in 2020, the starting salaries for teachers with the most prevalent qualifications (i.e. a bachelor's degree in the German-speaking Community) are slightly above, but close to the OECD average of USD 36 116 in purchasing power parities (PPP) at the lower secondary level. The salary of a mid-career teacher (after 15 years of experience) is also close to the OECD 2020 average of USD 49 701 (see Figure 4.7).

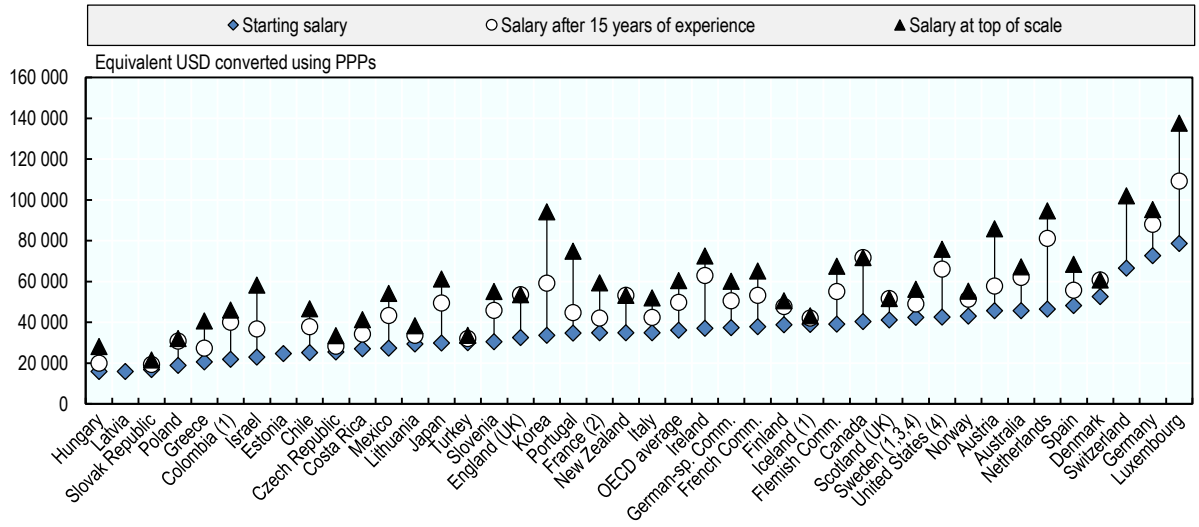
The range of teachers' pay scales and their slope (i.e. the rate at which salaries increase over the course of a teacher's career) vary significantly across OECD countries with available data (OECD, 2021[3]). In a number of countries, teachers earn comparatively little at the beginning of their careers but experience a stronger salary increases as they gain further qualifications or seniority. In 2018, Chile, Hungary, Israel and Korea, for example, top-end salaries for teachers with the highest qualifications can exceed those of beginning teachers with minimum qualifications by more than 150%. By contrast, the salary scales in countries like Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, which offer some of the highest starting salaries, are more compressed (OECD, 2019, p. 394[16]).

Salary scales in the German-speaking Community of Belgium are somewhere between those extremes and relatively close to the OECD average (see Figure 4.7). Based on 2020 current salary scales, teachers with the most prevalent qualifications, i.e. a bachelor's degree, earn about 61% more if they are at the end of their career compared to their peers who just joined the profession. This progression is slightly smaller than the 67% difference observed on average across the OECD. The difference between the starting salaries of teachers with minimum qualifications and those of the most qualified teachers at the end of their careers is 114% (above the OECD average of 85%). The pursuit of additional qualifications – particularly of master's qualification, can thus accelerate an otherwise modest salary progression – as is the case in jurisdictions like England (United Kingdom) (OECD, 2019, p. Table D3.1a[16]). However, it should be noted that the minimum qualification for teachers in the German-speaking Community (i.e. below upper

secondary for teachers on deviation contracts) is low in international comparison and few teachers are remunerated based on salary scales II and III.

Figure 4.7. Teachers' salary progression (ISCED 2, general programmes), 2020

Annual statutory salaries of teachers with the most prevalent qualifications in public institutions, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for private consumption



1. Year of reference 2019.
2. Includes the average of fixed bonuses for overtime hours.
3. Excludes the social security contributions and pension-scheme contributions paid by the employees.
4. Actual base salaries.

Note: Comparability between salaries in the German-speaking Community and other OECD jurisdictions is limited by methodological differences; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of starting salaries of teachers with the most prevalent qualifications.

Sources: OECD (2021[3]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en, Table D3.1; Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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Regulation of teachers' time

Teachers in the German-speaking Community are employed based on a teaching load system, which defines their weekly hours of instruction, but not their overall workload. Central regulations stipulate minimum and maximum teaching loads depending on teachers' level of instruction and subjects taught (see Table 4.4). School leaders decide whether to exhaust the maximum number of teaching hours or assign teachers other tasks and responsibilities instead of the remaining instruction time (i.e. 2-4 hours per week). The tasks teachers are expected to perform in their working time are defined by the 1998 Decree (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1998[17]). There is no reduction in the teaching hours for beginning teachers. Based on 37 weeks of instruction per year, the annual statutory teaching hours in general lower secondary education would amount to around 814 to 888 hours, compared to the OECD average of 723 in 2020. In primary education, the statutory teaching hours in the German-speaking Community amount to around 888 to 962, compared to the OECD average of 791 (OECD, 2021, pp. 393, Table D4.1[3]).

Table 4.4. Regulation of teachers' time in the German-speaking Community, 2021

Minimum and maximum teaching hours of full-time teachers, as defined by legislation

		Minimum	Maximum
Pre-primary education		28	28
Primary education		24	26
Mainstream lower secondary	General and technical subjects	22	24
	Vocational or technical and vocational (year 1)l	22	24
	Technical and vocational (years 2 +3)	24	28
	Vocational (years 2+3)	30	33
Mainstream upper secondary	General and technical subjects	20	22
	Technical and vocational	24	28
	Vocational	30	33
Special secondary education	General and technical subjects	22	24
	Technical and vocational	24	28

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Schools can request additional release time for teachers to engage in non-instruction activities (*Sonderaufträge*) for a limited period of time and for specific tasks or school project (e.g. related to support for gifted students, student heterogeneity or the *École Numérique* programme). Requests for additional release time are granted by the minister, usually on a part-time basis, and often amount to a few hours a week. Across the 65 primary and secondary school sites and the AHS, 157 staff (52 FTE) were granted release time in 2020/21. The total release time granted for school teachers increased from around 30 FTE in 2016/17 to 47 FTE in 2020/21, 16 FTE of which related to assignments outside of schools, relating to multiple levels of education (see Table 4.5). Centrally granted release time can only be given to teachers on open-ended or permanently appointed contracts, but schools can decide to reduce teaching hours or reallocate them internally to allow individual teachers to engage in special tasks. (The ministry does not monitor this practice) (MDG, 2022[1]).

Table 4.5. Release time granted for special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) in school education, 2016-2020

Full-time equivalents

Type of school	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Special needs education	6.4	9.6	8.9	9.3	7.3
Primary school	0.4	4.6	3.4	8.9	6.6
Secondary school	1.8	1.4	5.7	12.6	16.6
Working across levels	21.1	19.8	19.2	17.0	16.1
Total	29.8	35.4	37.1	47.8	46.7

Note: Some additional release time is granted for staff working at Kaleido and the music academy (1.7 FTE in 2020/21), which is not included in this table. Examples of assignments across levels of education include, for example, work in the minister's cabinet, pedagogical work in cultural institutions, co-ordination work for the OSU and FSU networks or work with teacher unions.
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Teachers' well-being at work

A 2020 study commissioned by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community observed a steady increase in the total number of days teachers reported incapacity for work, rising by 41% from around

21.200 days (10.9 per teacher) in 2015/16 to 29 800 days (14.6 per teacher) in 2018/19. Over the same period, the report observed an increase in the average duration of sick leaves from 8.6 days to 10.6 days. In the school year 2018/19, 4% of teachers' working days were lost to illness or other incapacity to work (it has steadily increased from 3% in 2015/16) (Walther, 2020[13]).

Teachers, but also other staff working in schools, can face a high amount of stress on the job (Johnson and Simon, 2015[18]). The relationship between teachers' working conditions, their occupational well-being, their job satisfaction and the quality of their teaching is receiving increasing attention from policy makers and researchers (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[6]). Research in multiple OECD countries has documented that chronic teacher absences are a great concern not only for their own well-being, but also for their students' learning, given its disruptive effects and the frequently less experienced substitutes that replace them (Viac and Fraser, 2020[19]; Herrmann and Rockoff, 2012[20]; Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006[21]). The rise in the prevalence of long-term illness among teachers in the German-speaking Community has renewed the focus on teachers' health and well-being and further initiatives are planned to improve the situation (MDG, 2022[1]).

All school providers in the German-speaking Community have access to some external services to promote their teachers' well-being, including psycho-social risk analyses and consultations, prevention programmes around health and well-being and surveys of teachers' well-being and satisfaction. The FSU and GUW networks have also conducted a psycho-social risk analysis in all of their schools. Some of the initiatives that have been taken to promote teachers' well-being include central training for "persons of trust" (*Vertrauenspersonen*) who can provide advice and mediation in situations such as workplace harassment, bullying or excessive workloads. More recently, the FSU network has launched a virtual platform ("*It's Teacher Time*") focused on well-being to allow their teachers to share experiences and practices during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (MDG, 2022[1]).

Teacher evaluation

Teachers in the German-speaking Community are evaluated by their school leaders. The frequency of evaluations depends on their contract status. Teachers on temporary fixed-term contracts (and the newly introduced open-ended contracts during the career entry period) are expected to be evaluated at least once a year and teachers on temporary open-ended contracts are expected to be evaluated at least every three years. There is no requirement for teachers on permanent contracts to undergo regular evaluations, unless they are requested by the staff in question, the school leader or the school provider, or in case a formal complaint has been filed (MDG, 2022[1]).

Teachers' evaluations are carried out by their school leaders and based on a lesson observation and subsequent conversation to set objectives for the next evaluation period. The external evaluation has developed a lesson observation sheet highlighting indicators of effective teaching, which can be used to guide principals' evaluation.[17] School leaders are joined by a member of the school inspectorate for the evaluation of teachers who have been employed in spite of insufficient qualifications (under a "deviation" contract) for three years, for teachers who will be eligible to complete their career entry period in the following year, and for permanently employed teachers whose evaluation has been requested by the school leader or provider.

Evaluations conclude with an evaluation report and an overall grade (very good [*sehr gut*], good [*gut*], satisfactory [*ausreichend*], insufficient [*ungenügend*], deficient [*mangelhaft*]). The evaluation is guided by a framework provided by the Government that is common for all schools. The framework lists the teachers' main duties as defined in the 1998 Decree and asks principals to evaluate each with a grade. The duties include teachers' core duties of lesson preparation, teaching and fostering competencies in line with the core curriculum. Teachers need to obtain a good grade on their teaching-related duties in order to receive a good overall grade. In addition, teachers are rated on a range of other duties, including the participation in professional learning and teacher conferences, participation in the school's internal evaluation,

interactions with parents, collaboration with psycho-medical-social staff and external school services, and displaying "teacher competencies" (subject knowledge, language competency and social competency). In addition, the evaluation report allows school leaders to define goals for the upcoming evaluation period and a space to assess whether teachers have fulfilled their goals in the preceding evaluation period.[18]

Within the relatively limited scope of their application, teacher evaluations in the German-speaking Community serve both formative and summative purposes. Following an "insufficient" evaluation, school providers can decide not to renew teachers on temporary fixed-term contracts (or the new open-ended appointment during the career entry period) after 30 June of a given school year. If teachers on temporary open-ended contracts receive a "deficient" or "insufficient" rating, the school leader is required to conduct another evaluation in the following year, at which point an "insufficient" rating leads to the termination of their contract after 30 June that year. The same process applies to teachers on permanent contracts.

School leadership and other staff

Profile, selection and preparation of school leadership

Every primary and secondary school is headed by a school leader. As of 2021, there were 10 school leaders at the secondary level and 27 school leaders at the primary level, 13 of whom were responsible for more than one of the 57 primary school sites, particularly in rural areas (MDG, 2022[1]). The great majority of school leaders in the German-speaking Community are between 40 and 60 years old. This is roughly in line with the pattern observed in most OECD countries where – on average at the lower secondary level – school leaders were 52.2 years old, with 92.3% above the age of 40, and 20% above the age of 60 in 2018 (OECD, 2019, p. Figure I.3.2[12]). In contrast to the teaching profession, the majority of school leaders in the German-speaking Community are men (57% at the primary level and 50% at the secondary level) (MDG, 2022[1]).

Apart from a few exceptions, most school leaders have a teaching qualification and were previously employed as teachers in a school at their respective level of education (MDG, 2022[1]). Until recently, primary school leaders were required to have obtained either a teaching qualification for the pre-primary, primary or secondary level (AESI/AESS) or another master's degree in a pedagogical subject. Since 2020, difficulties to fill leadership positions have led the Community to drop the requirement for school leaders at the primary level to hold a teaching certificate. Now, the position only requires a bachelor's degree, which had already the case for school leaders at the secondary level for several years.[19]

The selection processes for school leaders are organised by the schools' respective networks. In the case of GUW networks, an independent commission assesses candidates based on their qualifications, experience, an interview and a strategic school development plan that needs to be submitted as part of the application.

Within the first five years on the job, school leaders of all school networks are required to complete a part-time professional development programme, which lasts two years and is offered jointly with an external provider. At the time of the review, the programme was offered with the German Academy for Pedagogical Leadership (*Deutsche Akademie für Pädagogische Führungskräfte*, DAPF) in Dortmund (Germany).[20] The programme includes modules on school management and development, team building and communication, school evaluation, relevant legal frameworks and a module designed by each school network to address topics specific to their schools. The programme is also open to teachers who are interested in assuming school leadership roles in the future. Primary and secondary school leaders without a teaching qualification are required to complete an additional module (10 ECTS) on pedagogical matters, but do not need to do so before taking up their positions (MDG, 2022[1]).

School leaders' career structure and remuneration

School leaders, once selected, are employed on open-ended contracts without trial period (MDG, 2022[1]). In the school year 2020/21, primary school leaders in the German-speaking Community were paid according to separate salary scales depending on the size of their school and – in contrast to teachers – independent of their highest level of educational attainment (see Table 4.6). For primary school principals, all prior work experience, regardless of the type of work, counts towards new principals' recognisable years of service and their position on the respective salary scale (the end of the scales are reached after 25-27 years of experience). Secondary school principals were remunerated based on a single scale but received a fixed monthly bonus depending on the type of school they led (EUR 497 for mainstream schools with fewer than 600 students; 746 for mainstream schools with more than 600 students; EUR 1 393 for special needs secondary schools) (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Salaries school principals, 2020

Annual gross statutory salaries (incl. monthly bonus for secondary principals), in EUR

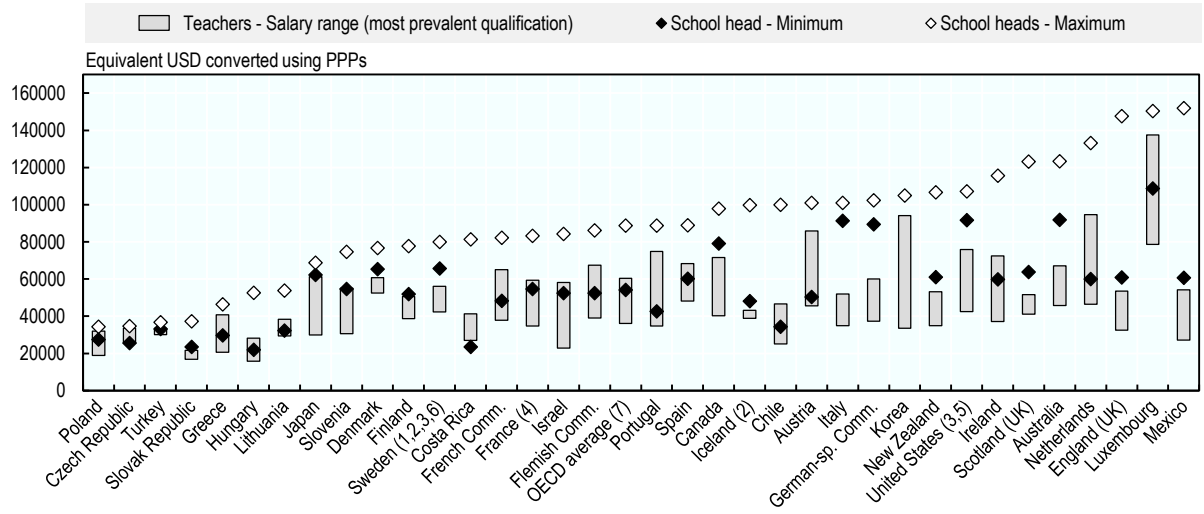
	School type	Minimum salary (no prior experience)	Maximum salary
Primary schools	Up to 71 students	33 057	55 279
	72 to 140 students	34 489	56 730
	141 to 209 students	39 128	64 884
	210 students and more	39 128	64 884
	From Sept 2021: Fewer than 300 students	51 897	81 127
	From Sept 2021: At least 300 students	54 028	83 258
Secondary schools	Mainstream, fewer than 600 students	76 693	83 750
	Mainstream, at least 600 students	79 677	86 734
	Special education	87 439	94 496
	From Sept 2021: Fewer than 600 students	68 039	113 211
	From Sept 2021: At least 600 students (and SEN)	89 781	126 733

Note: Minimum salaries for secondary school principals in 2020 are based on 19 years of prior experience, all other minimum salaries are based no prior experience (i.e. effective starting salaries will be higher); Salaries for 2020 based on the indexation value of 1 January 2021 (1.741); Salaries from Sept 2021 based on the indexation value of 1 Sept 2021 (1.7758).
Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Evidence from OECD reviews suggests that the status and attractiveness of school leadership roles can suffer if their compensation fails to reflect their higher level of responsibility (Nusche et al., 2016, p. 172[22]). For leadership positions to be financially attractive, they need to be competitive with those of jobs with similar levels of responsibility in the public and private sectors, but also compared to those of senior teachers among whom most school leaders are recruited (OECD, 2019[5]). Although maximum salaries for school leaders typically exceed those of teachers, their salary ranges overlap in many OECD systems (see Figure 4.8). In the German-speaking Community, the salaries of secondary school principals are attractive in international comparison and well differentiated from those of teachers (although the potential salary progression for principals is comparatively small). By contrast, at the time of the OECD review, the maximum salaries of school leaders at the primary level (not shown in the Figure) were not much higher than those of their most experienced teachers. This was the case particularly in smaller primary schools, where the leaders' maximum salary (EUR 55 279) was little above that of a teacher with the most common qualifications (EUR 50 889) (MDG, 2022[1]).

Figure 4.8. Minimum and maximum statutory salaries for teachers and school heads, 2020

Annual salaries in public lower secondary institutions (general programmes)



1. Year of reference 2019 (for principals).
2. Year of reference 2019 (for teachers).
3. Actual base salaries.
4. For teachers, includes the average of fixed bonuses for overtime hours.
5. Minimum principals' salary refers to the most prevalent qualification (master's degree or equivalent) and maximum salary refers to the highest qualification (education specialist or doctoral degree or equivalent).
6. For teachers, excludes the social security contributions and pension-scheme contributions paid by the employees.
7. Principals' averages exclude countries for which either the starting salary (with minimum qualifications) or the salary at top of scale (with maximum qualifications) is not available. It refers to the average value for the ratio, and is then different from the ratio of the average maximum salary to the average minimum salary.

Note: Comparability between salaries in the German-speaking Community and other OECD jurisdictions may be limited by methodological differences; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of maximum salaries of school heads; All salaries for teachers with most prevalent qualifications and school heads with minimum qualifications.

Sources: OECD (2021[3]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en, Tables D3.1 and D3.4; Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

StatLink https://stat.link/4qd17w

Since the OECD review visit took place, principals' salaries in the German-speaking Community have been significantly increased, starting with the 2021/22 school year (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 2021[23]). This included moving all primary school principals to a unified salary scale above the one previously reserved for the largest primary schools as well as adding a bonus based on school size. This raised their maximum annual salary to about EUR 81 100 for principals of primary schools with fewer than 300 students and to around 83 300 for schools with at least 300 students, thus significantly narrowing the gap between the salaries of primary and secondary school principals (MDG, 2022[1]). Likewise, new salary scales were introduced for principals of secondary schools (with fewer and more than 600 students respectively), raising their maximum salaries further above the OECD average (see Table 4.6).

Middle managers and other staff in schools

In secondary schools with at least 550 students, the school leader is supported by a vice principal (*Unterdirektor*). In addition, secondary schools can employ two teachers as part-time middle managers

(those with more than 600 students can employ three). The role of middle managers was created in 2018, replacing the previous role of co-ordinators, which had been introduced in 2014.[21] Middle managers support school leaders and assume different responsibilities related to school development, quality assurance, knowledge transfer and the support of teacher collaboration (Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, 1998[17]). They receive a monthly bonus of around EUR 435 for their work (MDG, 2022[1]).[22] Middle managers of all secondary schools (GUW and FSU) can participate in regular meetings to engage in professional exchange, which are usually held about twice a year.

School leaders in secondary education can select teachers to serve as subject team leaders (*Fachteamleiter*) in mathematics, German language, French language and natural sciences. In addition, two system-wide subject advisors (*Fachberater*) can be nominated by the minister. These roles are not remunerated but those who hold them benefit from a reduced teaching load and six two-day training modules to prepare them for their roles. Subject team leaders receive a 2-hours teaching load reduction to support the quality of teaching in their subject area by convening regular subject group meetings within their schools and attending inter-school meetings of teachers convened by the subject advisors. Subject advisors' teaching load is reduced by a quarter to allow them to support subject team leaders in their roles, co-ordinate professional learning in schools and co-ordinate the schools' work with the pedagogical advisory services of the AHS (MDG, 2022[1]).

The school leader of the special needs secondary school is supported by five *Fachbereichsleiter* (instead of middle managers), who can assume responsibilities related to, for example, the implementation of core curricula, the acquisition of pedagogical materials, collaboration among staff or the development of school calendars. (For a more detailed description of staff available to support students with special education needs, see Chapter 3).

School leaders can reduce individual teachers' instruction hours to allow them to contribute additional time to school projects or other non-instruction tasks (e.g. related to the use of ICT systems and the *École Numérique* programme). They can do so by requesting additional resources from the ministry to reduce individual teachers' instruction hours (*Sonderaufträge*), provided that they are on open-ended or permanently appointed contracts, or by reallocating teaching hours internally. These measures are temporary though and not associated with a formal change of status, contract modalities or remuneration (MDG, 2022[1]).

In addition, every secondary school in the German-speaking Community has a resource library (*Schulmediothek*) including digital resources and a school librarian responsible for advising on the use of these resources to teach information and media competency (IMK) based on the teachers' guide (*IMK-Leitfaden*) (MDG, 2022[1]). Each secondary school can also hire a finance and property manager (a "selection position") and – starting with the school year 2021/22 – a full-time ICT co-ordinator (*IT-Beauftragte/r*). In 2018, administrative support for primary schools was strengthened through the introduction of a head secretary (*Chefsekretär/in*) role. Primary school providers receive resources for head secretaries based on the total number of primary students in their jurisdiction, which they can then allocate to schools. Those with fewer than 100 primary school receive a quarter position and an additional quarter position for each additional 100 students.[23]

Strengths

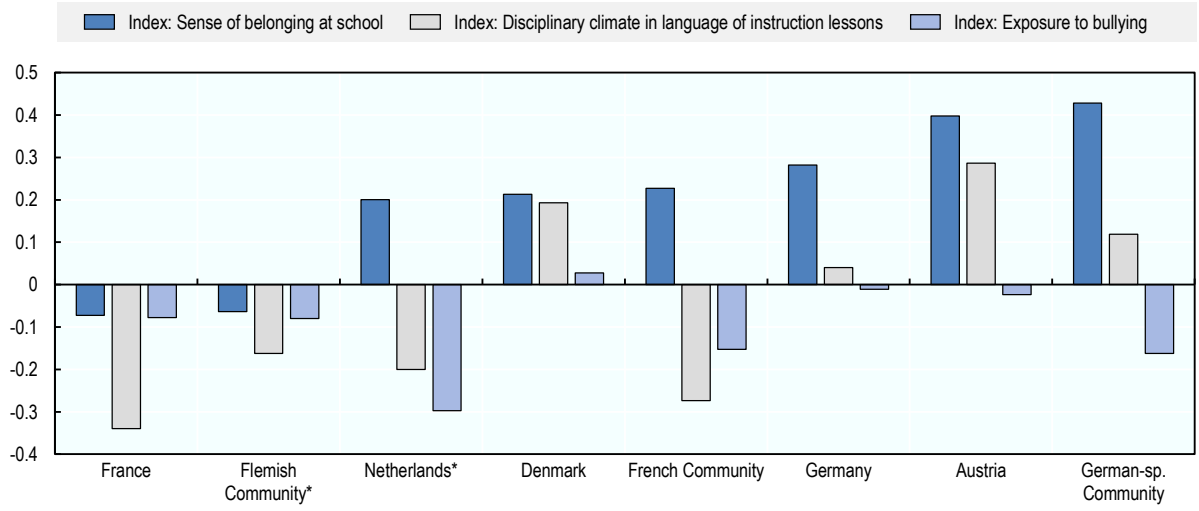
A positive school climate provides a good basis for further strengthening student-teacher interactions and student-centred, high-quality teaching

By international comparison, the school climate in the German-speaking Community appears to be very positive. In PISA 2018, 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community reported a strong sense of belonging at school (0.43), a lower than average exposure to bullying (-0.16), as well as a good

disciplinary climate (0.12) (OECD, 2019, p. Tables III.B2.9.1 and III.B2.3.1[24]) (see Figure 4.9). This speaks to the fact that schools in the German-speaking Community manage to create a welcoming environment in which students feel well and appreciated.

Figure 4.9. School climate and students' sense of belonging at school, 2018

Based on 15-year-old students' reports



Note: The PISA indexes reported here have an average of 0 and the standard deviation is 1 across OECD countries.
Source: OECD (2019[24]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en, Tables III.B2.9.1, III.B1.9.1, III.B2.2.1, III.B1.2.1, III.B2.3.1 and III.B1.3.1.

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Lesson observations conducted by the external evaluation between 2016 and 2020 confirm that the vast majority of schools are successful in creating a learning environment that minimises disruptions and allows teachers to spend their time in the classroom effectively (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 17[25]). This creates good overall conditions to further strengthen teachers' interactions with students and foster a more differentiated and student-centred approach to teaching.

There is a recognition that the improvement of teaching and learning in the German-speaking Community needs to be embedded in a more holistic reform process

There is a widespread recognition among key stakeholders in the German-speaking Community that the policy framework of the teaching and school leadership professions requires reform. In 2015, the Community started a process to modernise and simplify the teacher service code (*Dienstrechtsreform*) as part of the "good personnel for good schools" initiative (*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen*, GPGS) (Minister of Education and Scientific Research, 2015[26]).[24] The reform initiative's scope was wide-ranging, including topics such as teachers' recruitment and career structure, their professional development and working conditions as well as related topics such as the organisation of the school year. Following a stakeholder consultation process and discussions documented in two interim reports (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[27]; Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[28]), it was agreed in 2016 that the successful reform of the teacher service code should not be pursued in isolation but would need to be embedded in a coherent vision for the entire school system and pursued in line with the development of the overall vision for the education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*).

This is an important strategic choice as it allows to ensure greater coherence across multiple areas of reform and to create synergies between related policy domains, including the reform of the core curricula, school leadership and teaching, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation. It also provides an important opportunity to align the reform of teaching and school leadership with the German-speaking Community's overall vision for its school system – for example, as a system that places students at the centre and ensures that all students can succeed. This can help to create a clearer narrative around the aims the reforms of teaching and teacher policy are intended to pursue, which speaks to teachers, leaders and other stakeholders alike.

There have already been encouraging efforts to make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions

In light of the significant staff shortages and concerns about the deterioration of teachers' well-being, raising the attractiveness of a career in schools is an important policy objective for the German-speaking Community. In recent years, several encouraging efforts have been undertaken and there remains a political commitment to pursue further reforms to make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions.[25]

One of the challenges that has recently been addressed is the job security of beginning teachers. While the system of permanent employment has made the teaching career attractive for incumbents, it creates significant uncertainty among beginning teachers who have to reapply for their positions on an annual basis until they obtain a permanent post. Starting with the 2021/22 school year, this system has been reformed and all new fully-qualified teachers will be offered a new type of temporary open-ended contract, provided that they also fulfil the additional job requirements (*Bezeichnungsbedingungen*), notably the requisite language skills, and that a position is available for the school year.[26] This can be expected to ameliorate the situation somewhat by providing greater job security at the beginning of teachers' careers and by reducing the high administrative burden associated with recurring applications for beginning teachers.

The creation of the middle manager and subject team leader roles has created new career opportunities for teachers in secondary education while strengthening school capacity and reducing the burden on school leaders. This forms part of a wider set of measures aimed at increasing the attractiveness of working in schools. These also included raising school leaders' salaries in the 2021/22 school year, the introduction of head secretaries in primary education, which should lower the administrative burden on primary school leaders, and the introduction of pre-primary assistants (*Kindergartenassistenten*) to support the work of pre-primary teachers.

In 2019/20, the AHS has extended its support groups for beginning teachers to the pre-primary and secondary levels of education. Particularly in a context where support for beginning teachers remains limited at the school-level, these groups can offer an important platform for teachers to learn from one another and collectively address challenges they encounter during their first years on the job. Overall, these initiatives and reforms constitute important steps in the right direction and can be further built upon to strengthen the teacher profession in the German-speaking Community.

School-wide professional learning days can be an effective way to complement self-directed and other forms of professional learning and advance school improvement

Schools in the German-speaking Community can choose three to four days a year to dedicate to the professional learning of all of their teaching and support staff. The release time dedicated to these professional learning days constitutes a significant investment in teachers' professional learning and provides an opportunity for all staff to receive coordinated training or discuss and contribute to school development plans in a collective setting. As illustrated in Box 4.1, jurisdictions in several OECD countries

have introduced system-wide professional learning days, similar to the ones in the German Community's schools, albeit with specific characteristics.

Box 4.1. Professional learning days in selected school systems

Professional learning days for teachers and school leaders that are agreed or mandated at system level have been introduced in several OECD jurisdictions, although approaches vary between systems.

- In **New Zealand**, "Teacher-Only Days" (TODs) or "Call-back days" for professional learning have historically been organised during school holidays. However, the latest collective agreement between the central government and the main teaching unions creates eight additional teacher-only days spread over the three years 2020 to 2022 to support the implementation of changes to national secondary-school examinations (NCEA), as well as wider strengthening of curriculum, progress and achievement practice. The dates of the days are fixed in the collective agreement and materials and guidelines are developed and distributed nationally.
- In **Canada**, the negotiated number of professional development days in Canada range from 20 days per school year in Quebec to three days in Newfoundland and in Saskatchewan. In Quebec, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia, some of these centrally-mandated days can also be used by teachers for self-directed professional learning. The provision of funding for self-directed learning days in other provinces typically depends on individual school board policies that make allowances for one or two individually directed learning days per teacher per year.
- In **Victoria (Australia)**, each teacher is entitled to one "Professional Practice Day" (PPD) per term (four days per year), when they are released from their scheduled duties to focus on the improved delivery of high-quality teaching and learning. These days are in addition to the four existing "pupil-free days" per year, organised as "whole-school" activities in line with guidelines from the state government. Teachers must use their PPDs on professional learning activities that are consistent with state-wide priorities and the School Strategic Plan (SSP) in their school. Supporting resources for teachers and for school leaders in planning PPDs have been developed by the Victorian Department of Education.

Sources: New Zealand Government (2020[29]), *Accord Teacher-Only Days*, Ministry of Education, https://www.education.govt.nz/school/school-terms-and-holiday-dates/accord-teacher-only-days/ (accessed on 15 December 2021); Campbell et al. (2017[30]), *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada,* Learning Forward, Oxford, OH, https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/state-of-educators-professional-learning-in-canada.pdf; Victoria State Government (2020[31]), *Professional practice days*, Victoria State *Government - Education and Training*, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/ppe-practice-days.aspx (accessed on 15 December 2021); Adapted from OECD (2021[32]), "Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for Wales", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 33, https://doi.org/10.1787/caf912c7-en.

The success of school-wide professional learning days depends on what this time is used for and how it complements the self-directed and other forms of professional learning undertaken by school staff. All-staff training can be particularly effective to raise awareness of national policy or collectively engage in school-wide development projects (OECD, 2021, p. 28[32]). The central guidance on topics that should be pursued in the fourth annual school-wide development day is a useful steering tool that can help to align professional development activities pursued at the school level with system-level development needs.

To achieve sustained, cumulative and quality professional learning as a basis for effective teaching, whole-school events need to be complemented with activities that allow teachers – on their own or in groups – to transfer and assimilate new ideas into their classroom practice (Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017[33]). This requires time, follow-up and support and – ideally – should involve iterative

combinations of exploration of students' learning needs and experiences, new ideas from research and best practice and professional dialogue rooted in analysing evidence from teachers' experiments with those ideas and approaches in classrooms (Cordingley et al., 2015[34]). To achieve a balance between these complementary forms of professional learning, some systems combine whole-school development days with individual development days that teachers can use more flexibly through the year to pursue their own professional learning. An example of this in Victoria (Australia) is described in Box 4.1.

The Community draws on external capacity and expertise and attracts experienced professionals through alternative pathways into teaching

The German-speaking Community draws on international expertise to overcome some of the inherent limitations imposed by its limited capacity and size. The initial preparation of secondary teachers takes place abroad, mostly in the French Community of Belgium. While this reduces the Community's scope to align teachers' ITE with its own vision for high-quality teaching and can create difficulties for teachers starting to teach in a different language than that of their ITE, it also provides prospective teachers with a specialised education that the German-speaking Community could not offer, due to its limited size. Likewise, the Community complements its continuing professional development offer for teachers and school leaders with courses offered by international providers, mostly from German-speaking countries.

The German-speaking Community also attracts many second-career teachers and, in recent years, has taken additional steps to attract professionals with experience in other sectors, e.g. by recognising previous experience and creating more flexible qualification requirements for primary school leaders. Although lowering qualification standards to attract teachers comes with risks (see further below), it has allowed the Community to mitigate some of the negative impact of teacher shortages. It has also allowed the Community to build a strong technical and vocational sector that is closely connected with industry by bringing in motivated teachers with professional expertise.

Challenges

The implementation of a student-centred curriculum is held back by a lack of ownership in the profession and insufficient emphasis on collaboration within and between schools

The successful implementation of the Community's revised core curricula will depend on their widespread acceptance and socialisation among teachers and school leaders and the ability of schools and their staff to use them effectively to help all students attain their learning goals. Doing so will require actively involving the profession throughout the revision process and strengthening a culture of collaboration and continuing learning within schools (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[35]). The German-speaking Community's core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) describe the general and subject-specific competencies that students are expected to develop at key stages of their primary and secondary education. Teachers in each school are expected to work in teams and take these central core curricula as a basis to develop their own school-based curricula (*schulinternes Curriculum*), defining the school's approach to specific subjects (*Fachcurricula*) in line with the school's educational project, as well as the school's approach to teaching interdisciplinary competencies across subjects (*Teilcurricula*). The core curricula, as described to the OECD review team, are thereby intended to play a central role in encouraging teachers to collaboratively tailor the content and pedagogical approaches they use to the needs of their pupils while fostering competency-oriented teaching and – by encouraging teachers to work across subjects – promoting student-centred learning. The revisions of the core curricula are intended to declutter and modernise them and increase their coherence across grades.

These ambitions are laudable, given that teaching in the Community remains insufficiently student-centred and educational outcomes remain below the Community's potential (see below). Yet, the

German-speaking Community is far from realising these aspirations and using the core curricula as a key driver of teaching quality and progress towards the development of school-based curricula has been limited (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 36[25]). School evaluations conducted between 2016 and 2020 suggest that many schools had not yet developed school-based curricula and that the majority of teachers questioned their use. Where school-based curricula were developed, they were usually weakly connected to the schools' own learning projects (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 36[25]). Interviews conducted by the OECD team added to the impression that most teachers felt little ownership over the core curricula (and had little awareness of their revision) and some expressed doubts about the purpose of working with them. Although the core curricula are intended to provide high-level guidance rather than detailed prescriptions, some teachers felt they were overloaded or constraining. Teacher interviews conducted during the first diagnostic phase of the *Gesamtvision* process confirmed that widespread uncertainties remained around their purpose and application (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[36]). Likewise, schools are lacking a culture of systematic collaboration and the structures needed to co-ordinate instruction across subject lines and around a holistic conception of students' learning.

Teaching is not sufficiently student-centred and does not give enough weight to interdisciplinary competencies

In interviews with the OECD review team, multiple stakeholders have expressed their concerns that teaching in the German-speaking Community is not sufficiently student-centred and that it fails to accord sufficient weight to interdisciplinary competencies (incl. 21st century skills). A commitment to fostering student-centred and differentiated instruction was conveyed to the OECD review team by different ministerial actors and the preamble of all core curricula states that "Competency-oriented teaching means that the student is at the centre of instruction."[27] Nevertheless, this ambition is not reflected in high-level strategic documents, such as the vision statement (the *Leitbild* "*Bildungsregion DG – Unser Zukunftskapital*") guiding the regional development concepts (MDG, 2009[37]). While the vision statement mentions individualised support for gifted students and those with SEN, it lacks an explicit commitment that could underpin a strategic orientation towards these goals for all students.

While the school inspectorate and development counsellors noted some progress, recent evaluation reports based on lesson observations in 28 primary and 2 secondary schools found that teaching in many schools remains „highly teacher-centric" (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 43[25]). According to evaluation reports, about two thirds of the evaluated schools (42 of 64) also showed deficits in developing a competency-oriented assessment concept linked to their school-based curricula (MDG, 2022[1]). The external evaluation also identified deficits in the area of cognitive activation (less than half of observed lessons adequately promoted self-directed learning) and differentiated teaching (only a third of observed lessons provided students with individual and adaptive support) (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 24[25]).

Evaluation reports and interviews with students corroborated that further improvement is needed to raise the quality of teaching in schools. There was a general perception that instruction was dominated by frontal methods and focused on content knowledge. The 2018 PISA survey also indicates a need to provide students with more regular feedback to help them self-evaluate. 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community reported below average levels of teacher support (-0.49 s.d.) (OECD, 2019, p. Table III.B2.5.1[24]), and one of the lowest levels of teacher feedback in any OECD country (lower than in the Flemish and French Communities) (OECD, 2019, p. Tables III.B1.6.3 and III.B2.6.3.[24]). This suggests a relatively widespread feeling among Belgian students that their teachers could provide them with more feedback on how to improve their performance, where they can improve and where they see their strengths. Different stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team also suggested that the importance of students' well-being as a condition for their learning success was not yet accorded sufficient attention in teachers' and school leaders' initial and continuing education.

Effectively implementing a competency-oriented curriculum that places learners at the centre will require teachers to work together within and across subject groups to develop their school-based curricula and co-ordinate their teaching practices. Teachers' social competencies and their "ability to cooperate with colleagues in their school team" are among the seven competency pillars defined by the AHS and the OECD review team noted a strong sense of collegiality and willingness among most teachers to help one another out. This was echoed in the reports of the external school evaluation, which saw evidence of systematic cooperation among staff in nearly all schools (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 51[25]). Yet, there is limited systematic and effective collaboration in schools to co-ordinate teaching around a holistic conception of students' learning.

Not all forms of collaboration are equally effective in translating into deeper forms of collegiality or the development of professional practice within and across schools. To make teams effective, it is crucial to support collaborative working cultures with expertise, dedicated time, specific designs, protocols, structures, and processes to guide conversations so that peers can improve their practice (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018[38]). In the German-speaking Community, this kind of support for systematic collaboration focused on collaborative professional development, the improvement of teaching practices and student learning, remains limited. As highlighted in the results of external school evaluations, teachers in many schools also fail to effectively collaborate across subject lines to integrate the competencies described in core curricula into their teaching (MDG, 2022[1]).

Although there are some schools in the German-speaking Community that set aside weekly time for co-ordination and collaboration as well as some schools that emphasise interdisciplinary learning projects bringing together teachers from different subjects, overall, the culture of professional collaboration is weakly developed. The OECD review team saw no evidence, for example, of regular peer observation in schools and there was no shared conception that collaboration is expected of all teachers. This may be rooted in the lack of clear and widely acknowledged teacher standards as well as the fact that school leaders have little leverage to set expectations and motivate teachers to engage in collaborative work. Some teachers resist the notion that their professional obligations extend beyond their instruction hours and their individual work, for example on lesson preparation and marking. Although effective collaboration can make teachers' work more efficient and rewarding, there is a risk that teachers and school leaders perceive a zero-sum trade-off between time spent on collaboration and other obligations – with the former losing out amid a busy school schedule.

Teachers feel little ownership over the core curricula and are not sufficiently involved in their revision

The revision of the core curricula offers an opportunity to provide teachers with a shared aspiration for student learning around which they could be supported to further develop their practice and collaborate as they translate them into school-based curricula that cater to their students' needs. Research suggests that curricula that are less prescriptive and afford more decision-making freedom to schools – such as the German-speaking Community's – may appear less focused and offer less guidance to teachers, but they tend to be more sustainable in the long run, provided that school leaders and teachers understand the principles underlying the curriculum and build capacity to teach accordingly (Nieveen and Kuiper, 2012[39]; OECD, 2020[40]). Participating in ongoing school and curriculum development activities could also provide a good context for continuing professional learning and for fostering teachers' sense of belonging to a recognised profession. For this to be the case, however, the German-speaking Community needs to ensure that the process of developing, revising and implementing the new core curricula is sufficiently inclusive for teachers and other school staff to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to them (see Chapter 2). Maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout all stages of a reform facilitates trust in the process and broader ownership of its vision, which are key for the design, implementation and sustainability of policies in the medium and long term (Viennet and Pont, 2017[41]).

As it stands, professional ownership of the core curricula is low. Few of the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team appeared to see the core curricula as a useful instrument and reference to guide their professional practice and few were aware of their revision. First drafts of the revised core curricula are developed by ministerial staff and external experts without input from the profession before they are submitted for revisions to a working group comprised of only two teachers per school network (MDG, 2022[1]). This can give the impression that the curricula's revision is seen as a technical exercise conducted by experts, rather than building on the involvement of a broad set of stakeholders (which could also involve parents' representatives, teacher unions, school providers, industry representatives, the department of youth and culture etc.). Although there are plans to invite school leaders to comment on the revisions and ask them to solicit feedback from their teachers, the involvement occurs late in the process and it is not clear how the quality of teachers' involvement at the school level will be guaranteed.

The teaching profession lacks a clear vision, opportunities and support to engage in continuing professional growth from the beginning to the end of their careers

Highly effective teachers are key to improving students' learning outcomes, their cognitive as well as social and emotional competencies (Kraft, 2017[42]; Jackson, 2018[43]; Chetty, Friedman and Rockoff, 2014[44]). As discussed above, the German-speaking Community is suffering from a shortage of teachers (see Figure 4.4). According to the ministry, this has resulted in an increase of out-of-field teaching, particularly in the natural sciences at the secondary level, which has been hypothesised to be one factor explaining the decreasing share of top science performers in recent PISA tests.

In order to attract promising candidates to pursue a career in schools and retain its best teachers, the Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and motivating throughout the entire career. Supporting teachers to engage in continuing professional learning, facilitating their collaboration with peers and rewarding their growing expertise with new responsibilities lies at the heart of this challenge. This is particularly vital for a system with a large number of teachers who enter the profession with minimal pedagogical training or completed their initial teacher education outside the Community. To achieve this goal, the German-speaking Community needs to make continuing professional learning a key element in its vision for the teaching profession and strengthen its support for continuing professional growth at all stages of the teacher career.

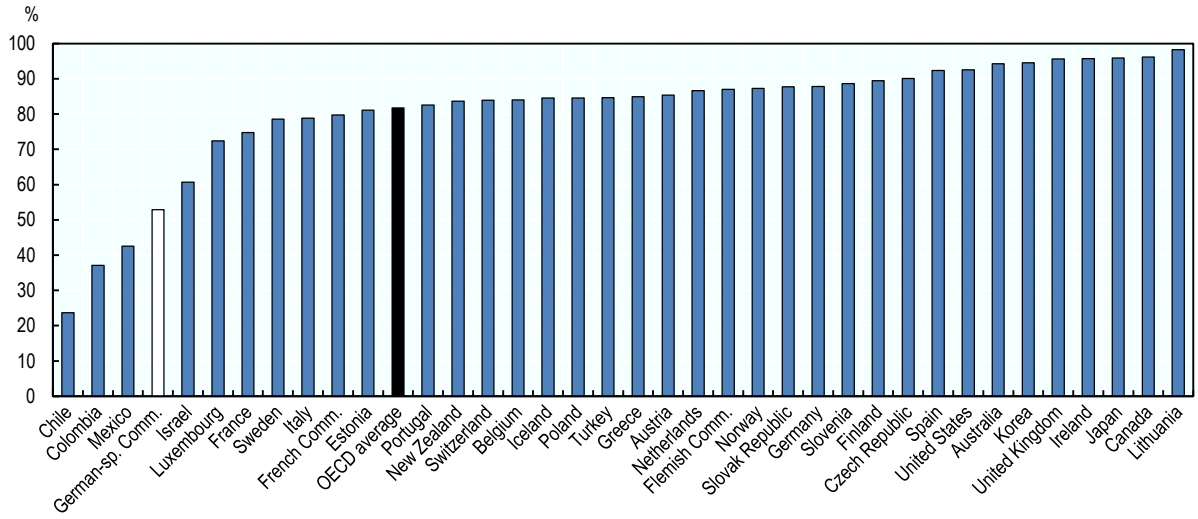
Different standards for teaching have been developed by different actors in the system, covering different elements of the teacher profession (including the AHS' "teacher competency pillars" guiding their primary and pre-primary ITE programmes and the external evaluation's lesson observation sheet). Yet, the OECD review team gained the impression that there is no widespread knowledge or sense of ownership of these standards among the profession, that they were developed in relative independence of one another and that there is no document describing an overarching vision that could serve as an aspirational document guiding the development of teachers at all levels and throughout their careers.

A large number of teachers enter the profession without requisite qualifications and are not sufficiently prepared when beginning their work

Ensuring that teachers are well-prepared for their work and supported during their first years on the job is a significant challenge in the German-speaking Community since a high proportion of staff enter the profession without requisite qualifications and no ITE for secondary teachers is offered in the Community. Although the share of staff entering the teaching profession through alternative pathways is not yet centrally monitored, principals' responses to the PISA questionnaire suggest that they comprise a significant proportion of the staff at the secondary level. In 2018, secondary school leaders reported that just 52.9% of their teaching workforce was fully certified (less than in any OECD jurisdiction outside of Latin America and considerably below the OECD average of 81.8%) (see Figure 4.10). Many of these teachers are presumably employed under the "deviation" system.

Figure 4.10. Percentage of fully certified teachers in secondary education, 2018

Results based on reports of principals of 15-year-old students



Source: OECD (2020[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Table V.B2.4.6.

StatLink https://stat.link/hd19bo

Although pre-primary and primary school teachers employed under the deviation system eventually need to obtain a teaching diploma in order to transition to a regular (temporary fixed-term) contract, targeted support is needed to ensure that they rise to the challenges of teaching when they first enter the classroom. At the secondary level, lateral entrants are encouraged to pursue CAP/CAP+ qualifications of limited scope (15-30 ECTS) via in-service training, which – on its own – is unlikely to provide them with all that is needed to be a successful teacher. Even secondary teachers joining the profession through the conventional pathway have completed their initial education abroad – mostly in the French Community. As a consequence, beginning teachers may face difficulties adjusting to teaching in a new language of instruction (or, for teachers of German, teaching the subject as a first rather than a second language) and working with the German-speaking Community's curricula.

The German-speaking Community is not the only OECD education system in which a notable share of teachers join the profession through alternative pathways. In Estonia and Lithuania, 18.5% and 15.3% of lower secondary teachers who had completed their formal teacher education in the last five years prior to TALIS 2018 reported that they had obtained their certification through a fast-track or specialised programme. Other countries where a significant proportion of new teachers completing such a programme include the Flemish Community of Belgium (13.3%), Colombia (13.6%) and England (United Kingdom) (14.1%) (OECD, 2019, pp. 207, Table I.4.12[12]). Nevertheless, the German-speaking Community stands out in international comparison and recent reforms aimed to address staff shortages by attracting more second-career teachers and school leaders are likely to exacerbate the challenges surrounding the successful integration of lateral entrants.

Although rigorous evidence on the effects of alternative pathways in advanced economies is limited (OECD, 2019[5]), critics tend to point to their risk of "de-professionalising" teaching and devaluing of the complex skills of teachers (Zeichner, 2014[45]). What is certain is that lowering entry requirements and attracting more lateral entrants makes it all the more important to support teachers during their first years

on the job and setting them on a path of continuous improvement in order to avoid aggravating their lack of preparedness and lowering the quality of teaching.

Support for beginning teachers can be strengthened

The transition from initial education to primary and secondary teaching is a critical stage in preparing teachers and helping them to be effective in the classroom (Jensen et al., 2012[46]; Paniagua and Sánchez-Martí, 2018[47]). Although much remains to be understood about the types of support that work best, and why, effective induction programmes of sufficient duration and intensity have been shown to significantly improve the retention of beginning teachers and the quality of their teaching (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011[48]). Supporting teachers from the start of their careers is particularly important for a system where many teachers enter the profession with limited pedagogical training. Against this backdrop – despite recent improvements – the level of support provided to beginning teachers in the German-speaking Community is too limited, especially for those entering the profession laterally.

On average across OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018, 22% of beginning lower secondary teachers reported that they participated in formal induction activities during their first employment, while 31% participated in informal induction programmes. 22% of beginning teachers reported having been assigned a mentor as part of a formal arrangement at their school (OECD, 2019, p. Tables I.4.38 and I.4.64[12]). While the AHS offers a two-year induction programme consisting of regular meeting for secondary, primary and pre-primary teachers to learn from one another during their first years on the job, there is no systematic support at the school level. Intensive pedagogical coaching and direct feedback have been shown to have the strongest impact on beginning teachers. This type of support is best provided closer to the teacher, in a format that allows for continuous, hands-on and more contextualised support to help new teachers address the day-to-day challenges they encounter in their schools (OECD, 2019[49]).

Although the OECD review team saw examples of schools providing beginning teachers with mentors, the practice is not widespread or supported through additional personnel resources, which makes it difficult for schools to provide this support systematically in practice. Starting with the 2020/21 school year, accompanying and providing advice to beginning teachers and student teachers has been added to the list of all teachers' formal responsibilities, which signals a clear commitment to improve the support for beginning teachers. However, effective mentorship takes time and preparation. The absence of structures and systematic support (also, for example, in the form of reduced instruction hours) can create challenges, especially in light of the large number of teachers joining as lateral entrants who may face greater difficulties adjusting to the new working environment.

There is also no dedicated systematic support for teachers entering the profession without requisite qualifications, either at the central or the school level. Many of teachers entering secondary school through alternative pathways do not immediately pursue in-service training for the CAP/CAP+ during the year they enter a classroom. To become effective educators, it would therefore seem particularly important to provide them with dedicated support to address the unique challenges they may face.

Teachers' continuing professional learning is weakly linked to individual and school-wide development processes and school-based, collaborative formats are not widely spread

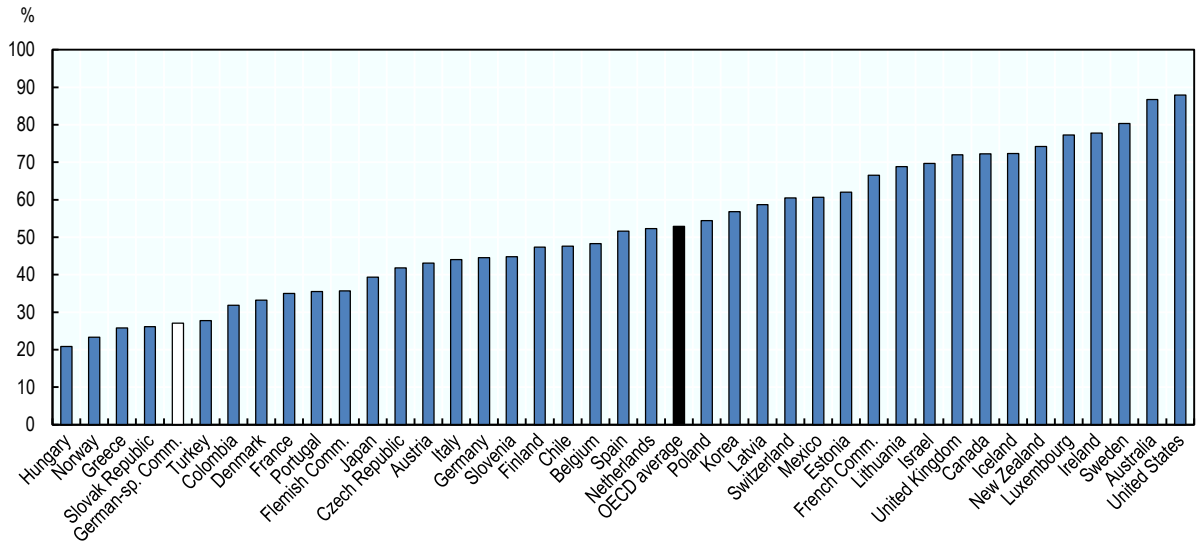
Continuing professional learning (CPL) is vital for teachers to refresh, develop and broaden their knowledge, and to keep up with changing research, tools and practices to respond to students' needs (Kraft and Papay, 2014[50]). The evolving context of learning and teaching in the German-speaking Community will continue to place new demands on teachers, such as their active involvement in the ongoing development of school-based curricula or providing differentiated teaching to increasingly diverse learners. To successfully meet these challenges, teachers will need to continue improving their practice throughout their careers.

Engagement in continuing professional learning remains low

Although the AHS offers a range of professional development courses, in international comparison, teachers' participation in continuing professional learning in the German-speaking Community appears limited. In 2018, principals reported that around 27% of teachers participated in professional development activities over the previous three months, on average (Figure 4.11). This was significantly below the OECD average of 53% and lower than in the Flemish Community (36%), the French Community (67%), as well as countries like Germany (45%), France (35%) or the Netherlands (52%) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.7[4]).

Figure 4.11. Teachers' participation in professional development activities, 2018

Percentage of teachers who attended a programme of professional development in the previous three months, based on principals' reports.



Note: Not all forms of (independent or informal) professional learning are captured by this statistic and the timing of professional learning activities may affect the results in some countries, for example those that concentrate them in a particular time of the year.
Source: OECD (2020[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en, Tables V.B2.4.7 and V.B1.4.7.

StatLink https://stat.link/bipc8l

No system-level information is systematically collected on teachers' participation in learning activities or the quality of the professional learning offer. Nevertheless, ad hoc analyses of the external evaluation confirm that participation in individual professional learning activities outside of the 3-4 compulsory training days remains low. In the school year 2018/19, the external evaluation estimated that 40% of staff members engaged in professional development beyond the school-wide training days,[28] the majority of whom engaged in a single full-day or half-day course (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 63[25]).

There is a lack of clear expectations around teachers' continuing professional learning

A number of factors contribute to teachers' low level of engagement in professional learning. Participation plays a marginal role in the teacher recruitment process, opportunities for career advancement are limited and professional learning is only weakly linked to teachers' appraisal process. In the absence of central requirements, there are few incentives for teachers to engage in professional development beyond the school-wide training days, at least once teachers have obtained a permanent or open-ended fixed-term

contract. Participation in professional learning then largely depends on teachers' individual motivation and the OECD review team formed the impression that there was a lack of clear expectations around teachers' professional learning.

The German-speaking Community lacks a clear vision for the teaching profession that is based on a clear commitment to teachers' continuing professional growth. There are no widely acknowledged standards or competency profiles detailing what is expected of effective teachers at different stages of their careers. Although the seven competency pillars defined by the AHS state that beginning teachers should "enter into a dynamic of ongoing development", they are not widely used beyond initial teacher education and the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team had little awareness of the document and its ongoing revision. (It remains to be seen whether the AHS' newly developed competency profile, which includes an emphasis on self-reflection and professional development, will find applications beyond initial teacher education (AHS, 2021[9])). The review team also formed the impression that the quality criteria developed by the external evaluation to guide lesson observations (*Unterrichtsbeobachtungsbogen*) were not well-known or widely used as a reference document to clarify the skills that teachers are expected to display outside the context of their evaluation.

There is little structural support for teachers' engagement in professional learning

While the school-wide professional learning days are a significant and important investment in teachers' development, there is little structural support for teachers' engagement in sustained, collaborative CPL beyond them. In many successful school systems, time is made available to ensure that professional learning is a normal part of daily work life in schools (Jensen et al., 2016[51]). By contrast, teachers in the German-speaking Community do not have the right to a given number of individual professional learning days or courses per year and there is no time, besides the whole-school training days, that is explicitly set aside in their schedules to engage in learning activities with their peers. School leaders cited their difficulties in freeing up time for teachers to attend external CPL opportunities, following up on them and creating conditions for teachers to team teach or observe each other. This means that even motivated teachers may find it difficult to take part in professional learning, especially if their school suffers from staff shortages.

Another factor limiting teachers' engagement in professional learning, particularly at the secondary level, may be the limited training offer and the limited input that teachers have in shaping it. Although some teachers interviewed by the OECD review team were content with the learning offer, others noted the lack of relevant training to meet their learning needs. Although they may be consulted or provide feedback through their school leaders, active teachers are not usually represented on the professional development commission that decides on the training on offer. This limits opportunities for the profession to provide bottom-up input on the training offer (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[52]).

In addition, the AHS has limited capacity to provide subject-specific training for secondary school teachers and faces difficulties to establish itself as a partner that is perceived as legitimate and competent in supporting professional learning at the secondary level. Though teachers can engage in training offered by external providers outside the AHS, some teachers and school leaders reported difficulties in obtaining funding to take advantage of these opportunities. Although there are options to apply for additional training to be partially reimbursed by the central level, additional funding is difficult to obtain, particularly on shorter notice, and teachers in GUW schools reported that they would expect having to pay themselves for external training on specialised topics (such as dealing with specific special education needs). This constitutes a strong disincentive for teachers' engagement in continuing professional learning, particularly given the limited incentives linked to teacher evaluations, pay rises or career progression.

School-based, collaborative learning formats remain the exception

Teachers' CPL can take a great variety of formats, including both formal and informal activities aimed at helping teachers to update, develop and broaden their skills, knowledge and expertise. Despite growing international consensus that the most effective forms of CPL involve school-based, continuous and collaborative learning (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[52]), CPL in the German-speaking Community remains dominated by short one-off courses, a top-down approach to training contents and linear modes of provision through external trainers. Evaluations frequently find that these forms of professional learning fail to produce meaningful improvements in teaching quality or student outcomes (Garet et al., 2016[53]; Harris and Sass, 2011[54]). Apart from the school-wide training days, there is little continuous school-based professional learning embedded in teachers' everyday work and teachers rarely engage in professional learning with their peers, although the OECD review team has seen some examples of school leaders encouraging their teachers to serve as multipliers, passing on what they had learned to their colleagues.

Professional learning is weakly linked to individual and school-wide development processes

Finally, for teachers' professional learning to be effective, it needs to be responsive to the needs of schools, individual teachers and, ultimately, their students. Linking teachers' professional learning to their regular formative appraisal can be an effective strategy to accomplish this goal, yet CPL in the German-speaking Community is weakly linked to individual and school-wide development processes. There is a recognition that teacher evaluation could be strengthened as a tool for professional growth by placing greater emphasis on the improvement of teaching quality and strengthening its links to individual goal-setting and professional learning opportunities. There had been discussions in the context of the "good personnel for good schools" (GPGS) initiative to reform the evaluation system for beginning teachers and to place greater emphasis on formative appraisal. Although no reforms of the evaluation system had been announced at the time of the OECD review visit, there are plans to offer coaching to school leaders and introduce more systematic mentoring support (including training for mentors) for teachers as a pilot project in 2022 (MDG, 2022[1]; Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[28]).

Furthermore, formative appraisal is not mandatory and rarely carried out for teachers on permanent contracts. As a consequence, few schools practice a culture of regular feedback for teachers of all levels of experience that could guide their choice of professional learning activities. Recent reports of the external evaluation confirm this impression, noting that 53% of evaluated schools did not adequately take into account the qualification and learning needs of staff when planning their professional learning and in 39% of schools, the competencies gained through professional learning were not systematically used to promote the school's quality development (Cormann and Goor, 2021, p. 39[25]). As a consequence, teachers' choice of professional learning activities is mainly guided by their personal interests and not always centred on improving teaching or their school's development goals.

Opportunities for professional growth and teachers' career advancement are very limited

The career structure for teachers in the German-speaking Community offers few opportunities for professional growth and promotions that would allow teachers to assume progressive responsibilities in schools. At the secondary level, the introduction of the middle manager role constituted an important step towards strengthening leadership teams and providing teachers with formal leadership responsibilities and increased remuneration. The role of subject team leaders (*Fachteamleiter*), while not remunerated, also constitutes a step in the right direction by recognising the ability of experienced teachers to share their knowledge and co-ordinate teachers' collaboration to raise the quality of teaching in their schools. Beyond this, however, opportunities for career advancement within the classroom remain very limited, especially in pre-primary and primary schools where no selection positions exist.

Although school leaders in the German-speaking Community can create some degree of job differentiation by giving teachers special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) in exchange for reduced teaching hours, these are temporary and not associated with clear competency profiles or a formal career progression leading to further opportunities to assume leadership. This absence of a merit-based career structure providing opportunities for ongoing professional advancement based on teachers' observed performance risks to reduce their long-term motivation, fails to provide incentives for continuing professional growth and misses an opportunity to mobilise their contributions for leadership and school improvement processes. The minimum age of 50 for permanent contracts in most selection and promotion positions may further diminish the attractiveness of leadership roles for younger talent at a time when many schools struggle to fill vacant positions (MDG, 2022[1]).

In addition to the limited opportunities for professional advancement, the salary progression that teachers with a given qualification can expect over the course of their careers is modest (see Figure 4.7) and fixed salary scales provide school principals with no scope to reward teachers performing informal leadership roles financially (MDG, 2022[1]). Paying teachers based on their seniority and highest level of attainment rather than the relevance of their training, the work they perform or the quality of their teaching also provides few incentives for teacher to improve their skills and practice, particularly since evidence suggests that advanced degrees and experience (beyond the first few years) are not consistently linked higher performance in the classroom (Rockoff et al., 2011[55]; Kane, Rockoff and Staiger, 2008[56]).

School leaders are not sufficiently supported to engage in pedagogical leadership and use their autonomy to raise the quality of teaching in their schools

School leaders play a pivotal role in elevating the quality of teaching and learning in the German-speaking Community's schools. School leadership provides a bridge between system-level reforms and internal school improvement processes and will be critical to ensure that the Community's reforms result in improvements in teaching and student learning. The successful exercise of pedagogical leadership demands taking an active role in the school's self-evaluation and improvement efforts, in developing school-based curricula in pursuit of the school's educational project, in observing teachers in the classroom and supporting staff in their continuing professional learning to respond to the evolving needs of their students.

The reform of school leaders' salaries and introduction of new support roles at the primary level have been important steps to make the principals' role more attractive. Nevertheless, the OECD review team identified multiple challenges that need to be addressed for school leaders in the German-speaking Community to exercise their role as effectively as they could. First, school leaders have few opportunities to gain relevant experience prior to assuming their positions and some feel insufficiently prepared for their new roles. Second, school leaders have too little capacity and lack the structural support to pursue their pedagogical leadership role effectively. Third, school leaders lack control over key aspects of their school management, which limits their ability to build and lead successful teams of school professionals. The low level of preparation, training and support, combined with school leaders' limited autonomy in some areas of school management reduce the attractiveness of their role, which makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified and motivated individuals to the school leadership career. The following sections describe these challenges in more detail.

School leadership is not sufficiently distributed and school leaders lack capacity to effectively engage in pedagogical leadership

School leaders can play a critical role in raising school quality, in shaping their school's pedagogical profile by implementing the new core curricula and in creating an environment in which teachers continuously improve their competencies to support student learning. To engage in these tasks effectively, further efforts are needed to build their capacity and strengthen their role as pedagogical leaders. This starts with school

leaders' preparation and continuing development. This will be even more important for the German-speaking Community going forward since dropping the requirement for school leaders to hold a teaching certificate means that lateral entrants into the profession may that have neither the expertise, nor the perceived legitimacy to provide instructional leadership when assuming their roles.

Although the leadership training offered to prospective and serving principals is an important contribution to their professionalisation, interviews conducted as part of the OECD review visit suggest that some school leaders felt insufficiently prepared when assuming their roles and experience little support once they start. For many principals, learning happens mostly on the job. The limited opportunities for teachers to gain prior experience in intermediary leadership roles (see above) may contribute to these difficulties, as does the absence of mentorship structures that would allow experienced school leaders to support new colleagues. (At the time of the OECD review visit, there appeared to be little systematic collaboration among school leaders on topics such as school improvement or development and professional exchange appears to focus more on technical or procedural matters, such as the implementation of new regulations).

Although the creation of middle managers in secondary schools and head secretaries in primary schools can be expected to bring improvements, school leaders, still receive relatively little structural support in the form of an extended leadership team that could alleviate their administrative burden and assume shared responsibility for key aspects of school improvement. At the primary level, school leaders have no personnel supporting them in their leadership responsibilities, which is particularly problematic for leaders of larger primary schools and can contribute to a sense of professional isolation. As a consequence, the OECD's interviews suggested that – despite their expressed desire to engage in pedagogical leadership – school leaders find too little time to support their teachers' development, for example by engaging in regular lesson observation and providing feedback. In secondary schools, middle managers can offer support with these tasks, although the precise articulation of their roles varies from one school to another.

The external evaluation also identified widespread deficits in the area of leadership for school improvement, noting that not all schools operate an effective school improvement cycle, drawing on external and internal evaluations and other forms of evidence to develop and implement school improvement plans (see further below) (MDG, 2022[1]). This suggests a need for further capacity building and targeted support for school leaders.

The teacher recruitment system limits school leaders' ability to build effective teams of educators and the lack of a single service code creates inefficiencies

The teacher recruitment process in schools of the GUW and OSU networks is rigid, inefficient and undermines school leaders' ability to develop talent and create a good match between the staff and the schools' pedagogical project. Although school leaders in the German-speaking Community enjoy significant autonomy over the pedagogical orientation of their schools, the teacher recruitment system leaves them with little control over the hiring process. School leaders in the GUW and OSU networks are required to select teachers using a point-based ranking system (*Klassierung*) based on a limited number of criteria that privilege experience and formal qualifications but do not include interviews, letters of motivation or trial lessons, which could provide more evidence of teachers' performance, motivation and their fit with the schools' profile. This significantly reduces school leaders' ability to exercise professional judgement and autonomy in the selection of teachers. It also makes it difficult to develop and retain talent and create a good match between the teaching staff and the schools' pedagogical project (MDG, 2022[1]).

The decentralised nature of the teacher recruitment process and lack of a unified service code gives rise to inefficiencies, limits teachers' mobility and creates uncertainty for both teachers and schools. Each of the three school networks (and, in the case of the OSU network, each municipality) organise their own teacher recruitment process, applying slightly different selection and eligibility criteria. Teachers on temporary fixed-term contracts have to reapply for their positions each year and many of them apply to more than one provider (at the primary level, they can in theory apply to up to 11 – the GUW network, the

FSU network and 9 municipalities). Due to the lack of central co-ordination, candidates who are offered a position at the end of a lengthy selection process in June frequently turn down their offer for that of another provider at a late stage, making It difficult for providers to find a suitable replacement candidate before the start of the school year (MDG, 2022[1]). The differences in teachers' service codes across providers have created obstacles for synergies, such as the creation of a shared pool of substitute teachers, and reduce teachers' mobility since the 720 days of service required to obtain a permanent position need to be completed in schools of a single provider.

The regulation of teachers' working time fails to recognise the breadth of their responsibilities and reduces principals' ability to making time for continuous improvement

The work that teachers perform outside of the classroom is increasingly recognised as an integral part of their professional role and activities such as lesson preparation, marking, peer collaboration and professional learning demand a substantial amount of teachers' time (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021, p. 50[6]). On average across OECD countries, lower secondary teachers in TALIS 2018 reported working 38.8 hours per week and spending 20.6 hours teaching (in the German-speaking Community, official regulations stipulate 22-24 teaching hours for lower secondary teachers in general or technical subjects). That means, on average across the OECD, almost half of teachers' working time is spent outside the classroom, including tasks, such as lesson planning (6.5 hours), correcting students' work (4.2 hours), working with peers (2.7 hours) and professional development (1.7 hours) (OECD, 2019, pp. 205, Table I.2.27[12]).

The German-speaking Community is among a minority of OECD school systems that regulate teachers' working time solely based on their teaching hours, rather than their overall workload. 29 of 35 OECD countries and economies with available data specify teachers' overall statutory working time (i.e. the hours teachers are expected to work, including the time spent on teaching as well as non-teaching tasks) for at least one level of education. By contrast, 9 OECD systems only specify their teaching hours (across all levels of education in Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Mexico and the Flemish Community of Belgium, as well as for secondary school teachers in the French Community of Belgium and New Zealand, and for uppers secondary school teachers in Austria) (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[6]).[29]

Failing to recognise and explicitly account for the full breadth of teachers' responsibilities within and outside the classroom can be detrimental to their use of time and the status of their profession. It also diminishes school leaders' capacity to plan their teachers' time based on a holistic conception of their work. Particularly given the lack of clear and shared expectations concerning teachers' responsibilities outside the classroom, the regulation of teachers' time makes it difficult for school leaders in the German-speaking Community to dedicate time in teachers' schedules and motivate them to engage in collaborative work and peer learning in schools (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[6]; OECD, 2019, p. 162[5]).

There is a need to build further capacity for schools' self-evaluation and to strengthen synergies between the inspectorate, the external evaluation and support services

Raising the quality of education in the German-speaking Community requires schools to engage in a continuous process of improvement and the Community has taken important steps to place a greater emphasis on schools' development. Since 2009, all schools in the German-speaking Community are subject to external evaluations every five years and are required to engage in an internal evaluation once every three years. In 2016, the external evaluation process was reformed with the intention to involve schools more closely in the process (e.g. by allowing schools to select areas for special emphasis during the evaluation) and to place greater emphasis on strengthening schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation.

Despite the important progress made, the OECD's interviews suggested that the capacity for self-evaluation was not equally developed in all schools. Reports of external school evaluations carried out

between 2016 and 2019 noted that most school leaders were setting goals for the further development of their schools and the quality of teaching but underlined that the majority showed deficits in the management of school improvement processes. According to the evaluations, almost half of schools lacked a structured process for their school improvement cycle. Many failed to make their schools' development goals clear and transparent, to develop multi-year school development plans and to make use of the "school project" as a steering tool for school improvement (the school project should include an assessment concept [*Leistungskonzept*] and a professional learning concept [*Weiterbildungskonzept*]). Significant deficits were also observed in schools' collection and use of relevant data to improve their quality (Cormann and Goor, 2021[25]). It was also noted that school leaders required further support to select evaluation areas that are aligned with their school project (interview partners pointed to a deficit-oriented approach to school evaluations prevailing in many schools), to place teachers' professional learning and the quality of teaching at the centre of their school project and development plans, and to actively build on evaluation results in the process.

The OECD review team formed the impression that few schools embraced the external evaluation process as a tool for school improvement and an integral part of their improvement cycle. Although there have been some efforts to build capacity and awareness of the importance of school development (the AHS initial teacher preparation programmes now includes a module on school development and evaluation), some school leaders and teachers still appear to view the evaluation process through the lens of control. Interview partners suggested that self-evaluation reports were often seen as compliance documents rather than instruments to be actively worked with by all stakeholders in a school to advance its improvement between external evaluation intervals. Although, at the time of the OECD review, nearly all schools had undergone an external evaluation since the reform's process in 2016, and 42% of them had undergone a second evaluation, further efforts may be needed to improve school leaders' familiarity with the process and their ability to make most use of it to advance their schools' development.

To strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation, further integrate internal and external evaluation, and improve the follow-up on evaluation results, the Community needs to ensure that its monitoring and evaluation system is effective and coherent. A range of services can support schools in their improvement of teaching and learning, including the school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*), which can help schools in their development and implementation of school improvement projects and the AHS' pedagogical advisory services (*Fachberatungen*), which provide professional support to teachers and school leaders on subject-specific matters and the implementation of core curricula. However, the OECD review team gained the impression that, in many schools, the available services were not used to their full potential. One of the reasons for this may be their limited capacity, which places significant constraints on the ability of the school development counselling service and the pedagogical advisory services to effectively follow up on schools' evaluation results (at the time of the review, for example, there was only one counsellor focusing on school development).

Another reason for the low intensity of evaluation follow-up may be more structural, stemming from the institutional divides between the different support services involved as well as the distribution of responsibilities during the evaluation phase. As it stands, the external evaluation and pedagogical advisory services are under the auspices of the AHS, while the school development counsellors and the inspectorate are under that of the ministry. To effectively support schools in following up on their evaluation results, the pedagogical advisory service and school development counselling service need to collaborate closely. Despite the actors' constructive collaboration, their institutional divide may cause frictions in the flow of information, interrupt the continuity of support and make it harder for schools to understand whom to turn to for support. In interviews conducted during the first diagnostic phase of the *Gesamtvision* process, only 14% of stakeholders felt as though the external evaluation and follow-up support were well-aligned (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[36]).

In addition, there are some concerns around the division of evaluation responsibilities between the ministry's school inspectorate and the AHS' external evaluation team. The inspectorate contributes to the

summative appraisal of individual teachers prior to their permanent appointment. However, it also plays a role in school-level evaluations by validating and providing feedback on the school's development goals, ensuring that schools pursue and fulfil the goals they set following the external evaluation and checking if the development goals and competencies stipulated by the subject-specific curricula are taught. Given that school development plans are meant to build on the results of and inform future external evaluations, the rationale for the inspectorate's role in overseeing their development is not clear. This division of responsibilities between the inspectorate and the external evaluation team is unusual, in international comparison (OECD, 2013[57]) and may add to procedural frictions and uncertainty among schools concerning the different actors' roles. Likewise, if schools require further support in creating and implementing their development plans, they need to be referred back to the ministry's school development counselling service or – for subject-specific support – to the AHS' pedagogical advisory service.

Policy options

Bring teachers on board to successfully develop and implement the new core curricula

As discussed in Chapter 2, the core curricula can serve as a powerful tool to carry the German-speaking Community's overall vision for the education system into the classroom, provided that core curricula's revision is aligned with the goals formulated for the education system more widely. The core curricula's adaptation into school-based curricula has the potential to make them more relevant to the local context and thus more engaging for students, but it also requires teachers and school leaders to take responsibility for shaping the curricula. Without a sense of ownership among the profession, no curriculum – regardless of its design and content – will live up to its promise and affect meaningful changes in the classroom. In order to foster this professional ownership and ensure teachers' buy-in during the implementation phase, it is critical that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are strongly engaged in the development and revision of curricula, from the beginning (OECD, 2019[58]).

The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project has identified teachers' agency and active involvement during the curricula development as a critical factor for their success. While this engagement can take different forms, Ontario (Canada) offers one example of a curriculum design process that involved a wide variety of stakeholders, including school boards, educators, researchers, editors and others. Based on the inputs collected from these stakeholders, content editors prepared and revised drafts of curriculum documents through an iterative process of co-development that allowed for innovative ideas coming out of the consultations to be integrated in real time (OECD, 2020, p. 32[59]). An intensive engagement process can also increase the quality of the curricula, ensuring the relevance of their contents, avoiding overload and striking the right balance between guidance and flexibility (Gouëdard et al., 2020[60]).

Currently, a small group of teachers is invited to make adjustments to curriculum revisions proposed by experts and ministry officials while the rest of the profession may be consulted by their school leaders to provide feedback on complete drafts. Instead, teachers' input should guiding the curricula's revision from the very start and it has to be ensured that teachers' involvement at the school level is of sufficient intensity, involving structured discussions and professional exchange. Only if this involvement is sufficiently broad and meaningful will the German-speaking Community succeed in building teachers' sense of ownership over the core curricula and turn them into aspirational documents that give teachers a shared vision for student learning around which they can be supported to collaborate and professionalise. Achieving teachers' buy-in will also require authorities to demonstrate a credible long-term commitment to the new curricula. They should therefore be designed to be broad and general enough to ensure their long-term relevance and flexible enough to allow schools to adapt them to emerging needs over time.

Several other OECD countries have, in recent years, made successful efforts to involve the teaching profession and various education stakeholders in the revision of their curricula. Wales, for example, has

engaged in a process of "co-construction" that accorded a central place to the teaching profession and fostered its ownership over the revision of the curriculum (OECD, 2020[40]) and Finland has chosen a similarly inclusive approach when constructing its new curriculum between 2010 and 2016. A similar process is currently underway in New Zealand, where intensive support was found to play a critical role in improving the regard that educators have for the curriculum and increased their confidence and ability to give effect to the curriculum in their practice when they were first introduced in 2007 (OECD, 2021[61]) (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. Involving teachers and other stakeholders in the development of new curricula

"Co-constructing" the new Curriculum for Wales

In January 2020, the Welsh Government published its new Curriculum for Wales, which was developed based on a process of "co-construction" involving a large variety of stakeholders as "curriculum designers" over the course of several years. The curriculum is built around "four purposes" of education – a shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person to become:

- ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The curriculum is organised around "statements of what matters", which describe what is essential for students to learn in six "Areas of Learning and Experience" covering all school subjects. The type of learning promoted is holistic, interdisciplinary, and integrates knowledge, skills and experience together (i.e. competency-based). The four purposes have been a key driver of the curriculum framework development, providing the designers of the curriculum with a common language and direction to move forward. Experts and government officials worked directly with a network of "Pioneer Schools" and educators to design, test and refine the new curriculum before presenting the framework to the public for feedback and further refinement. The Welsh Government co-ordinated this development over the course of several years. For a full list of stakeholders involved in the curriculum development process, see OECD (2020, pp. 62, Table 3.1[40]).

Collaborative curriculum design in New Zealand

In New Zealand, work is underway in 2021 to refresh the national curriculum so that teachers will be better supported to design relevant and exciting learning experiences and make a positive difference for learners, their families and communities. Ministry officials have signalled their commitment to a collaborative process of co-design with opportunities for educators across the sector, learners, parents and families to be involved at all stages of the refresh. As one of the first elements of the New Zealand Curriculum to be refreshed, the "New Zealand's histories curriculum" has seen a draft designed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders. The draft has been the focus of widespread public consultation over several months, including a survey. Schools have also been invited to test the draft content over two school terms and provide feedback on their experience to the Ministry of Education.

Inclusive stakeholder consultation for Finland's new curriculum

In 2012, Finland launched a comprehensive reform of national curricula from pre-primary to upper secondary level to provide greater coherence across the system. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), approved the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE) and for Pre-primary Education at the end of 2014. The reform was the outcome of a "top-down, bottom-up" design and implementation process, which is frequently cited as a positive example of policy

co-creation. Teachers were involved from the very beginning and the participatory development helped foster teachers' commitment to the curriculum and collective sense-making across the system. To develop the curriculum, EDUFI established 34 national working committees and steering groups made up of various stakeholders (representatives from relevant ministries, municipal workers, teachers' unions, industry groups, parents' associations, textbook publishers, ethnic groups etc.), each with a specific focus. Their work was informed by a national survey administered digitally to students aged 13-16, which garnered 60 000 responses. The committees fed into the drafting of a 500-page national curriculum that was put to public consultation through three online commenting cycles receiving over 4 000 comments. EDUFI disseminated further targeted surveys among local education authorities and main stakeholders to capture their feedback (OECD, 2020, p. 20[62]).

The national core curriculum is supplemented by local curricula that allow schools to respond to regional characteristics and needs. Although local approaches varied, most municipalities established working groups responsible for taking the national guidelines and interpreting them within local contexts. They were directed to nearly 180 issues with concrete instructions and obligations on how to connect local educational goals with the national ones. Some municipalities hired curriculum coordinators to oversee the process. The local curricula were implemented in classrooms for grades one to six from the start of the school year 2016/17 and then on a year-by-year basis for grades seven to nine until 2019. In 2017, the ministry also allocated EUR 100 million for school providers to hire over 2 000 tutor-teachers to support school and teachers in implementing the curriculum.

Sources: OECD (2020[40]), *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, Implementing Education Policies, https://doi.org/10.1787/4b483953-en; Welsh Government (2020[63]), *Curriculum for Wales guidance*, http://hwb.gov.wales/storage/b44ad45b-ff78-430a-9423-36feb86aaf7e/curriculum-for-wales-guidance.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021); New Zealand Ministry of Education (2021[64]), *Refreshing The New Zealand Curriculum*, https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/changes-in-education/curriculum-and-assessment-changes/new-zealand-curriculum/ (accessed on 15 December 2021); Adapted from OECD (2021[61]), "Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for the Flemish Community of Belgium", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 31, https://doi.org/10.1787/7a6d6736-en; Lavonen, J. (2020[65]), "Curriculum and Teacher Education Reforms in Finland That Support the Development of Competences for the Twenty-First Century" in Reimers, F., *Audacious Education Purposes. How Governments Transform the Goals of Education Systems*; OECD (2020[62]), "Education Policy Outlook in Finland", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 14, https://doi.org/10.1787/f162c72b-en.

Efforts should be undertaken to better familiarise teachers with the content, design and structure of the revised core curricula. Teachers (and other stakeholders) will need to be reassured that the core curricula do not aim to prescribe detailed disciplinary learning contents but instead allow for a more holistic approach to students' learning across subject areas and to encourage reflections at the school level, positioning teachers as curriculum designers with freedom to develop their own learning approach. To ensure the curricula's successful implementation, teachers will need opportunities to practice their skills in developing and implementing school-based curricula based on the core curricula and to assess their students' progress against the competency-oriented learning goals. School leaders should play a key role bringing the school community together to learn about the curricula's rationale and in leading the development of a vision for meaningful school-based adaptations of the curricula that will inspire educators (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[35]). To support the introduction of the new core curricula, the Community should consider dedicating school-wide professional learning days to this topic. Given that the development of school-based curricula requires coordinated preparation, discussions and information sharing among teachers, collaborative school-based learning formats would allow teachers to engage with the core curricula in a hands-on setting with direct applications to their work. At the same time, throughout the implementation process, the evaluation system should consider the extent to which both schools and teachers have embraced the new curriculum and succeeded in adapting it to local contexts.

Strengthen teacher professionalism and support continuing professional growth throughout the teaching career

In order to sustainably address teacher shortages, attract talented individuals to the teaching career and sustain their motivation over time, the German-speaking Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and oriented towards continuing professional growth. Creating conditions in which the teaching profession can thrive and effectively promote student learning is a complex undertaking that requires a careful co-ordination between the different elements that govern teachers' careers, their working conditions and continuing professional growth. An OECD review of evaluation and assessment practices highlighted some of these elements whose alignment the German-speaking Community should pay specific attention to when planning and prioritising reforms affecting the teaching profession in the years to come (OECD, 2013, p. 93[57]):

- alignment between teaching standards and student learning objectives
- alignment between teaching standards and the teacher appraisal process
- systematic linkages between teacher appraisal and professional development
- alignment between teaching standards and teachers' career structure
- articulation between school-based teacher appraisal and external teacher appraisal
- linkages between formative teacher appraisal and high-stakes teacher appraisal
- alignment between skills taught in teacher education and teaching standards assessed in teacher appraisal.

While many of the elements characterising the governance of the teaching profession in advanced education systems are already in place in the German-speaking Community, others are less developed. In particular, the systematic linkages between teacher appraisal and professional development as well as the alignment between standards of high-quality teaching and a formal career structure are insufficiently developed. The system also lacks a clear vision and professional standards for the teaching profession that could serve an integrating role in harmonising these different elements. The following policy options describe how a clearer vision for the teaching profession and teacher standards could promote this integration, galvanise teachers' aspirations, foster a dialogue on the future of the profession and set high expectations for quality teaching. They also propose specific measures that should be considered to strengthen teachers' support during the first years on the job and their continuing professional learning.

Create a shared vision for the teaching profession and standards that can integrate different aspects of their career and professional development

With its overall vision for the education system (*Gesamtvision*), the German-speaking Community has set out to develop a shared vision that can guide reforms across the system in order to raise the quality and equity of education in light of the 21st century's challenges and opportunities (MDG, 2021[66]). It is clear that the teaching profession will play a pivotal role in ensuring that reforms translate into meaningful changes in the classroom and improvements in student learning. To mobilise the profession in achieving this vision for the education system, it will be important to reflect on the types of competencies and attitudes that teachers will need to play their part in fulfilling it. The Community currently lacks a clear, widely shared vision for the teacher profession and the development of the *Gesamtvision* could be a good opportunity to develop one. In the spirit of student-centred education, such a vision should be developed in close connection with the core curricula and guided by the question what and how the Community want students to learn, and what teachers need in order to enable this. It will be particularly important to recognise teaching as an evolving practice that requires continuing professional learning (the German teacher standards, for example include as a core criterion that "teachers understand their profession as a continuous learning task").[30]

Alongside a concise vision statement for the teaching profession, the German-speaking Community should consider developing a set of teacher standards that offer a description of what teachers should know and be able to do (Toledo, Révai and Guerriero, 2017[67]). Clear, well-structured and widely supported teaching standards are a powerful mechanism to define what constitutes good teaching and to align the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills (OECD, 2005[68]). As policy tools, such standards could serve as a reference point to inform the curricula for teachers' initial education, to guide school-level teacher evaluations and to support teachers' self-directed professional development (Révai, 2018[69]). In due course, they could also provide the basis for a transparent, merit-based career ladder (see further below).

Existing standards that have been developed by different actors over the years to cover specific aspects of the German-speaking Community's teaching profession could serve as a starting point for developing a unified set of standards. One of them is the newly developed competency profile (*Kompetenzprofil*) and the previous "competency pillars" (*Kompetenzsäulen*) developed by the AHS with a view to inform initial teacher education (AHS, 2021[9]). The quality criteria developed by the external evaluation to guide lesson observations (*Unterrichtsbeobachtungsbogen*) could also inform this process.

Other than is currently the case for the existing documents, a unifying set of standards could be strengthened by providing teachers and the evaluating school leaders with concrete examples of effective teaching practices and by differentiating them according to different levels of experience (e.g. beginning, intermediate and advanced). This would make them more effective tools for structuring formative evaluations and give teachers a clear sense of the steps they can take to advance their careers, especially if these standards are aligned with and direct teachers to a relevant professional development offer and, ultimately, opportunities for professional growth (OECD, 2019[5]).

As discussed in Chapter 2 – with reference to the revision of the core curricula – the key to the successful implementation of teacher standards will be to involve the profession in their design from the very start and to socialise them to ensure that the teaching profession develop ownership over them. The Professional Standards for Teachers developed in Australia provide a model for the development and use of teaching standards (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. The development and use of professional teaching standards in Australia

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers were developed through a collaborative process led by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and published in 2011. The standards describe what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at different stages of their career. They were developed by synthesising descriptions of teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement used by teacher accreditation and registration authorities, employers and professional associations. The process built on the close consultation with the teaching profession, employers and teacher educators, bringing together state governments, professional organisations and teacher unions, and involving almost 6 000 teachers in the standards' validation.

The standards are organised in a framework covering three domains of teaching (professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement) and seven Standards:

1. know students and how they learn
2. know the content and how to teach it
3. plan for and implement effective teaching and learning
4. create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments
5. assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
6. engage in professional learning
7. engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

Within each Standard, focus areas provide further illustration of teaching knowledge, practice and professional engagement. These are then separated into Descriptors at four professional career stages: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead (see

Table 4.7 below for an example). In addition, the AITSL's website (https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards) provides numerous "illustrations of practice" showcasing practical examples of teachers demonstrating the Descriptors in a classroom setting.

The Australian standards are used in teachers' registration process and underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes. They also inform teachers' voluntary certification for advanced career stages (of highly accomplished and lead teachers). In addition, the standards provide a framework can inform the professional development offer and the AITSL offers online resources to help teachers engage in high-quality professional learning that is aligned to both to their individual needs and the goals formulated in the standards. This includes an online Teacher Self-Assessment Tool with which teachers can review their practice against the Standards and receive personalised feedback. The tool may be used informally for self-reflection, identifying strengths and areas for further development, professional learning planning or to set career goals. It can also be used as part of formal processes, such as performance and development goal-setting, certifications and performance reviews.

Sources: AITSL (2011[70]), *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards (accessed on 15 December 2021); Adapted from Révai, N. (2018[69]), "What difference do standards make to educating teachers?: A review with case studies on Australia, Estonia and Singapore", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 174, https://doi.org/10.1787/f1cb24d5-en; OECD (2021[32]), "Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for Wales", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 33, https://doi.org/10.1787/caf912c7-en.

Table 4.7. Focus areas and Descriptors for Standard 6 ("Engage in professional learning") of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Focus area	Descriptors by career stage			
	Graduate	Proficient	Highly accomplished	Lead
6.1 Identify and plan professional learning needs	Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.	Use the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and advice from colleagues to identify and plan professional learning needs.	Analyse the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to plan personal professional development goals, support colleagues to identify and achieve personal development goals and pre-service teachers to improve classroom practice.	Use comprehensive knowledge of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to plan and lead the development of professional learning policies and programs that address the professional learning needs of colleagues and pre-service teachers.
6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice	Understand the relevant and appropriate sources of professional learning for teachers.	Participate in learning to update knowledge and practice, targeted to professional needs and school and/or system priorities.	Plan for professional learning by accessing and critiquing relevant research, engage in high-quality targeted opportunities to improve practice and offer quality placements for pre-service teachers where applicable.	Initiate collaborative relationships to expand professional learning opportunities, engage in research, and provide quality opportunities and placements for pre-service teachers.
6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice	Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.	Contribute to collegial discussions and apply constructive feedback from colleagues to improve professional knowledge and practice.	Initiate and engage in professional discussions with colleagues in a range of forums to evaluate practice directed at improving professional knowledge and practice, and the educational outcomes of students.	Implement professional dialogue within the school or professional learning network(s) that is informed by feedback, analysis of current research and practice to improve the educational outcomes of students.
6.4 Apply professional learning and improve student learning	Demonstrate an understanding of the rationale for continued professional learning and the implications for improved student learning.	Undertake professional learning programs designed to address identified student learning needs.	Engage with colleagues to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher professional learning activities to address student learning needs.	Advocate, participate in and lead strategies to support high-quality professional learning opportunities for colleagues that focus on improved student learning.

Note: The focus areas and Descriptors provided above only cover one of 7 Standards of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. For the full set of descriptors, refer to the source below.
Source: AITSL (2011[70]), *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Strengthen teachers' support during their career entry period

The German-speaking Community should make additional efforts to strengthen the support it provides to teachers at the start of their careers. The reform of teachers' career entry period (*Berufseinstiegsphase*) and the newly introduced open-ended contracts stand to provide them with additional job security during the first years on the job. However, to ensure that teachers are successful in launching their careers and joining the profession, they should be provided with additional support to address common challenges experienced by new teachers, such as bridging the gap between theory and practice, dealing with workload challenges, improving classroom practice and management, and understanding the school culture. This is particularly needed given the high share of teachers entering the profession through alternative pathways or who completed their ITE outside the Community.

Several indicators have raised concerns about a deterioration of teachers' well-being in the Community (including an increase in the frequency and duration of sick leave) (Walther, 2020[13]). Education authorities should take these signs seriously since they may be point to structural problems that can threaten the retention of teachers, the profession's attractiveness and, ultimately, its sustainability (Viac and Fraser, 2020[19]; Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2018[71]). The Community should

therefore continue to investigate the underlying causes of the phenomenon and address structural problems that may affect teacher's well-being. While professional support is only one of many factors that can contribute to teachers' well-being at work, the German-speaking Community should consider it as one important lever not only to improve their quality of teaching, but also to reduce their professional strain.

The support groups organised by the AHS are a valuable platform for beginning teachers to exchange and learn from each other's' experience, but they should be complemented by more continuous forms of support at the school level. A number of OECD countries have introduced induction initiatives designed to support teachers in the early years (OECD, 2019[49]; Jenset, Klette and Hammerness, 2017[72]). Since 2019, for example, the Flemish Community of Belgium has provided novice teachers with a right to an induction process to be organised by their schools and Japan has required schools to provide induction programmes since 1988 (see Box 4.4). The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) in Ontario is another example, which requires schools to offer orientation, on-the-job training and mentoring for all new teachers while providing the necessary financial support.[31]

Box 4.4. Induction as a right for new teachers in the Flemish Community of Belgium and Japan

Since September 2019, the **Flemish Community of Belgium** has established a right for novice teachers to receive induction and mandated schools to offer this support to ensure teachers' successful entry into the profession. Each school has the responsibility develop an induction programme for new entrants and can autonomously decide how they design and organise this support. The development of a framework for induction is supported by a Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) project on implementing an effective induction system in Flanders, funded by the European Commission. Schools give time to a member of staff to lead the implementation of their induction programmes and designate mentors. In many cases, the induction period provides novice teachers with opportunities to observe colleagues, to be observed by school leaders and receive feedback, and to team-teach or co-teach.

In **Japan**, the Boards of Education (BOE) of the 47 prefectures have been mandated to provide new teachers with 1-year induction training since 1988. BOEs can decide on the delivery and contents of induction programmes following guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The law requires the assignment of a mentor for every new teacher and central guidelines describe the tasks and responsibilities of: *Guidance teachers*, who are responsible for providing support to the new teachers for the school-based part of the teacher induction programme (generally 2 days per week); *subject specialists*, who are responsible for subject-specific training (generally 1 day per week); and *school principals*, who are the interface between the new and more experienced guidance and subject specialist teachers.

According to the central guidelines, induction programmes in Japan should consist of 300 hours of training, including 120 hours of in-school training, and at least 25 days of off-site training. The in-school training (generally 3 days per week) includes consultation, demonstration and observation sessions with the guidance teacher and subject specialist. Lessons are often preceded or followed by detailed discussions of lesson plans, instructional technique, and successes or challenges. At the end of the induction period, teachers need to pass an evaluation to obtain an unconditional employment status.

Sources: OECD (2021[61]), "Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for the Flemish Community of Belgium", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 31, https://doi.org/10.1787/7a6d6736-en; Eurydice (2020[73]), *National Reforms in School Education - Belgium - Flemish Community*, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-3_en (accessed on 15 December 2021); OECD (2018[74]), *Mandatory 1-year induction for new teachers in Japan*, OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study.

Induction processes can take a range of forms and may include orientation events for new teachers, sequences of first-year courses, mentoring, coaching and more (OECD, 2019, p. 283[5]). The German-speaking Community currently has no provisions for a sustained period of mentorship that is characteristic of induction practices in many high-performing countries (OECD, 2019[49]), but the OECD review team has seen examples of schools encouraging informal mentorship arrangements. The Community should consider ways to formalise these arrangements and ensure that each beginning teacher is assigned a mentor who can provide them with feedback on their work during their first year on the job. To make this practice sustainable and systematic, schools would need resources, including protected time for mentors to engage in regular support (including lesson observation and feedback or team teaching), a lighter teaching load for beginning teachers, as well as training for prospective mentors. Plans to introduce systematic mentoring support (including training for mentors) as a pilot project in 2022 should be welcomed as an important step in this direction. The results of the pilot should be carefully evaluated to determine the intervention's effectiveness and consider adjustments before rolling it out more widely.

Support teachers' engagement in continuing professional learning and link it more strongly to their regular appraisal and career progression

Teachers' engagement in effective forms of continuing professional learning is critical to raise the quality of teaching in the German-speaking Community and empower teachers to take an active role in the development of school-based curricula and implementing a student-centred approach to learning. As it stands, teachers' level of engagement in professional learning (beyond the mandatory school-wide training days) is limited. Embedding CPL as a core part of their practice will require a change in teachers' mind-sets. Including teacher's engagement in continuing professional learning as a dimension of their professional standards (see above) would help to clarify that teachers are expected to improve their practice throughout their careers. To increase teachers' sense of ownership over the training offer and to ensure that it matches teachers' needs, the Community should also consider how to involve them more actively in the development of the professional learning catalogue (e.g. by ensuring the representation of active teachers in the professional development commission).

Teachers' professional learning should also be linked more strongly to their individual development needs and those of the system, their schools and their students. To address this challenge, the Community should strengthen the role of formative appraisal in guiding teachers' professional learning. Teachers at all levels of experience should receive regular feedback on their work and school leaders should use these formative appraisals as an opportunity to discuss teachers' goals and learning needs and create individual professional learning plans to address them. This would strengthen teachers' accountability while supporting them in their learning choices. There is also scope to review more systematically how the school-wide training days are used and how activities undertaken during this time can be linked effectively to schools' improvement plans.

The appraisal of teachers' learning needs should focus on improving the quality of teaching, but also on building teachers' capacity to assume leadership in the school improvement process. The skills that teachers acquire through their successful engagement in professional learning should be recognised and rewarded. As discussed further below, connecting professional learning to opportunities for career advancement could be an effective means to incentivise teachers' continuing improvement and ensure that highly effective teachers assume responsibilities in the school community that are concomitant with their skills. Teaching standards with differentiated competency levels could guide teachers on this path of improvement. At the same time, teachers should be provided with the necessary supports to facilitate their engagement in more collaborative forms of professional learning (see below). At the time of the review, there was no central guidance on the characteristics of effective professional learning, but a set of quality criteria (*Gütekriterien*) currently in preparation by the professional development commission could provide further guidance for school leaders and teachers to decide on suitable learning activities.

Supporting teachers' engagement in continuing professional learning would not only require the right incentives, but also the removal of barriers that may prevent a more widespread participation in continuing professional learning. In addition to setting clear expectations concerning the professional learning that teachers need to engage in to improve their practice and advance their careers, teachers should be provided with the time and resources to pursue a corresponding amount of individual professional development. Many OECD countries set aside such time for their teachers. In Singapore, for example, every teacher is given 100 hours per year to invest in training, with guidance for their development decisions and access to teacher networks (OECD, 2019, p. 155[12]). As a result, the pursuit of continuing learning has become a regular part of teachers' day-to-day work and is engrained in schools' shared vision of the profession. Even though Singapore does not require teachers to engage in CPL, it is one of the countries with the highest levels of participation in training.

Besides a lack of time, prohibitive costs can be another important barrier for teachers' engagement in learning activities. Countries like Italy have therefore provided teachers with a training allowance that permits teachers to exercise autonomy and assume leadership over their professional learning journey (see Box 4.5). Schools in the German-speaking Community can use their grant for pedagogical purposes to support individual teachers' participation in training offered third party providers for topics not covered by the AHS. However, since there is little central guidance on the use of these resources, the Community should continue monitoring whether a difficulty to obtain funding in a reasonably timely manner constitutes a barrier for some teachers' engagement in the training they need.

Box 4.5. Combining mandatory professional development with a training allowance in Italy

The Italian government is focusing on school-level autonomy as a key lever for educational improvement. Reflecting this orientation, in-service professional development provisions at the school level and chosen by teachers are a key feature of the Good School reform (*La Buona Scuola*), introduced in 2015. The reform has made in-service training mandatory, permanent and structural. These provisions were designed to respond to the low participation of Italian teachers in professional development activities. First, the Italian government made a large financial investment (EUR 1.5 billion) exclusively for training in areas of system skills (school autonomy, evaluation and innovative teaching) and 21st century skills (such as digital skills, schoolwork schemes) and skills for inclusive education. Second, the programme stands out because of its tailored approach and scope of choice for teachers to participate in professional development according to their needs. This is done by providing teachers a sum of EUR 500 per year on their "Teachers Card" to participate in training activities, purchase resources (books, conference tickets, etc.) and offering matching processes to align training offers with training demands using a digital platform.

Source: OECD (2019[12]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en.

Create the conditions for greater collaboration within and between schools in order to implement a student-centred approach to teaching and learning

Foster cooperation and exchange among teachers, within and between schools

For the German-speaking Community to implement its competency-oriented core curricula successfully it will be necessary to foster greater cooperation and exchange among teachers. The development of school-internal curricula and the integration of inter-disciplinary competencies will only be effective if it is

understood as a collective endeavour that all teachers in a school engage in, across subject lines. Despite mounting evidence on its effectiveness, teachers in the German-speaking Community engage in little continuous, collaborative and school-based professional learning embedded in their everyday work. Yet, the experience in OECD countries shows that the implementation of curricula is greatly facilitated if schools operate as learning organisations in which the importance of individual, collaborative and collective learning is recognised at all levels (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[35]). The development of the German-speaking Community's overall vision could be good opportunity to anchor the system-wide commitment to student-centred education in a high-level strategic document and explain that increased collaboration across subject lines and types of school staff is needed to do justice to a more holistic view of the learner and students' well-being.

The Community should encourage schools and teachers to make professional learning a collaborative effort. Schools should promote peer learning among teachers, not only by encouraging them to act as multipliers passing on their learning from professional development courses, but also through a greater use of peer observation (e.g. lesson study) or enquiry projects (see Box 4.1 in (OECD, 2021[32])). If done well, with dedicated and shared time in teachers' schedules, teacher leadership, protocols and attention to culture, teachers' collaboration can increase their job satisfaction and students' growth (Kraft and Papay, 2014[75]; Johnson, Kraft and Papay, 2012[76]). To be effective, collaboration needs to be focused on improving the quality of teaching and requires specific designs, protocols, structures, and processes to guide teachers' conversations and actions (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018[38]). Central authorities can support these efforts, not only by strengthening school leaders' competencies to support collaboration and by making time in teachers' schedules, but also by offering technical support and developing protocols that schools can draw on (see Box 4.8 in (OECD, 2019[5]) for an example from Ontario [Canada]).

Project-based teaching and learning across subjects can help to bring the Community's revised core curricula "to life", encourage teacher collaboration and strengthen a student-centred approach to teaching. The OECD review team learned about several instances where schools implemented competency-oriented learning projects across subjects, including a two-year project on civic education developed by a secondary school in collaboration with the AHS' *Institut für Demokratiepädagogik* (IDP, 2020[77]). The Community should think about ways in which the lessons from such encouraging projects can be systematically preserved, shared and taken up by other schools. The regular meetings of school leaders could be an important platform to facilitate this transfer of knowledge across schools, as could a strengthened school development counselling or pedagogical advisory service.

Fostering a culture of collaboration within and across schools and creating awareness of its benefits will take time and needs to be supported by pedagogical leadership and resources (Stoll et al., 2006[78]; OECD, 2019[5]). Some education systems have set aside staff resources specifically to support teachers' collaboration, team teaching or peer observation (see Box 4.6). Freeing up additional teaching hours for teacher collaboration can be difficult in a context of acute teacher shortages, but school leaders could seek to create dedicated time for collaboration and collaborative learning by co-ordinating teachers' non-teaching hours. Their ability to do so can be facilitated or constrained by the way teachers' working time is regulated, which is discussed in the following section. It should also be considered to dedicate one of the school-wide learning days to promoting student learning in key competencies through inter-disciplinary instruction and teachers' collaboration across subjects. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Community should also consider the trade-off between keeping classes small and giving teachers more time to work and learn together.

Box 4.6. Support for collaborative learning in schools

Time for professional collaboration in Shanghai

In Shanghai, the school structure allows for teachers to collaborate on a daily basis as a part of their continuous professional learning. The system allows for this to happen by limiting the teaching time to 12 hours per week to leave room for collaborative time. During this time, teachers are involved in observing other teachers' lessons or taking up mentorship duties for new or struggling teachers. A key part of Shanghai's collaborative professional development is the sharing of best practices among teachers.

Structured team teaching in new Secondary Schools in Austria

Austria has introduced several opportunities for its teachers to collaborate as a part of the New Secondary School Reform (*Neue Mittelschule*, NMS). Several structures in the NMS allow for teachers to lead and work with their colleagues, through the creation of new roles, such as learning designers, subject co-ordinators and school development teams. The NMS also includes additional teaching resources for teachers to work jointly as teams in a single classroom. The team teaching approach was first piloted in the Austrian context in only a few subjects and later expanded to all the subjects of the lower secondary curriculum. This approach had implications on increasing the number of staff for each subject area in Austrian schools, while keeping the overall number of teaching hours the same. It allowed teachers to learn from each other by working in the same class and also to provide more student-centred teaching, especially additional support for low-achieving students. Some of this team teaching also allows teachers from different schools and varying education levels to come together and share best practices. The foundation of these structures was laid in 2008 with the introduction of the NMS Reform, but it applies to all teachers from the academic year 2019-20 onwards.

Sources: Adapted from OECD (2020[7]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, TALIS, https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en; Nusche, D. et al. (2016[22]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Austria 2016*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264256729-en.

Effective collaboration in schools requires not only time, but also guidance and support. Assigning subject team leaders or middle managers to focus on teacher collaboration and whole-of-school projects can be an effective strategy for secondary schools with sufficiently developed leadership structures. (Plans to finance an additional middle manager for secondary schools, starting with the 2022/23 school year, and explicitly giving them the responsibility to co-ordinate the integration of inter-disciplinary competencies could be an important step in this direction). The Community should consider creating similar opportunities for teacher leadership at the primary level and enable them to assign these responsibilities to motivated teachers in exchange for reduced teaching hours (more on this below).

In addition, the Community should consider whether the capacity of existing sources of external support, such as the pedagogical advisory services, could be strengthened to enable them to work with groups of teachers and school leaders, to build professional learning communities, to spread promising practices and to ensure that work in the learning communities is informed by evidence. Several OECD systems also use online platforms to make research evidence on effective teaching and learning available in accessible and applicable formats in order to support teachers' professional learning and collaboration.[32]

Reconceptualise teachers' working time to include both teaching and non-teaching time

The German-speaking Community should consider the benefits of employing teachers under a workload system that defines their overall working time. Conceiving of teachers' working time exclusively in terms of

their teaching hours fails to provide formal recognition for the time that teachers spend on important tasks outside the classroom. At the same time, it can diminish school leaders' capacity to plan their teachers' time based on a holistic conception of their work. The shortcomings of the current approach to teachers' working had previously been identified in discussions during the GPGS project (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[28]). In the current context, such a reform would have the potential to address multiple challenges identified by the OECD review team and support related reforms proposed by this review:

- First, teachers need dedicated time to engage in collaborative work with their peers in order to learn with and from each other and to successfully implement the core curricula at the school level. Revising teachers' contracts to be based on their overall workload could provide school leaders with more scope to set aside protected time for teachers to work on shared priorities in their school.
- Second, a workload-based conception of teachers' working time could provide a basis for granting schools more flexibility to create diversity in teachers' roles. For example, more of individual teachers' time might be allocated to instruction or non-instruction activities, depending on the functions they perform at their school. This would enable schools to recognise teachers' initiative and strengthen distributed forms of leadership (more on this below).
- Third, explicitly recognising teachers' overall workload (e.g. 38 hours a week for full-time teachers) and the time they spend on non-teaching activities would help to clarify and more clearly communicate expectations around teachers' tasks beyond the classroom. This could complement the qualitative descriptions of highly effective teachers' work included in the teaching standards, discussed above, by recognising the corresponding time commitment that this work entails.

In recognition of these advantages, several OECD countries have reformed their regulation of teachers' working time in recent years. In 2013, for example, Estonia, reformed its employment system to specify teachers' overall working hours (see Box 4.7). There is significant diversity in countries' approaches to implementing such a workload-based approach to teachers' time, how they balance teachers' teaching and non-teaching time and whether they specify how much time teachers should spend on the school premises (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[6]). Taking these decisions need not be a matter of central regulations alone. Some OECD systems, for example, have taken a decentralised approach to teaching load adjustments, giving local actors more flexibility in managing teachers' time based on their own criteria and assessments of teachers' tasks, competency or experience. In Denmark, for example, the implementation of Act no. 409 (2013) gave school leaders greater discretion to adjust the teaching hours and preparation time for individual teachers, e.g. to re-distribute the teaching load between experienced and inexperienced teachers or across subjects (Nusche et al., 2016, pp. 52, 88[79]). The implementation of Denmark's new framework demonstrated, however, that local actors need time to learn how to use this flexibility effectively and support teachers in changing their practices in ways that takes full advantage of the new arrangements (Bjørnholt et al., 2015[80]).

Box 4.7. Implementing a workload-based regulation of teachers' working time in Estonia

In 2013, teacher employment in Estonia was reformed based on the Working Time of Educational Staff Act. The reform marked a shift from a teaching load system – in which staff contracts only specified teaching hours – to a workload-based system that specifies the total number of working hours and defines the full range of tasks that teachers are expected to perform. The reform defined teachers' total annual workload to be 1 610 hours in pre-primary education and 1 540 hours in primary to upper secondary education (corresponding to 35 weekly hours). These overall working hours are below the OECD average, as were the teaching hours specified by the old system. The total annual working hours specified under the new system exceed the previously defined teaching hours by 290 hours in pre-primary education, 921 in primary and lower secondary education and 972 in upper secondary education. Given that the new regulations no longer specify teaching hours, the precise distribution of teachers' overall workload across teaching and non-teaching tasks is at the discretion of the school management. In some cases, school leaders' decisions on the use of teachers' time are subject to political agreements at the municipal level or with a school's teacher council.

Sources: Santiago et al. (2016[81]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en. Reproduced from OECD (2019[5]), *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7aaf050-en.

Expand elements of distributed leadership to strengthen school leaders' focus on pedagogical leadership and involve all staff in student-centred school improvement

In order to successfully implement student-centred curricula and develop schools into learning organisations, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen its schools' capacity for pedagogical leadership. Creating more opportunities for teachers – not only in secondary education – to assume greater responsibilities associated with formal career steps would facilitate distributed leadership by enabling principals to delegate certain aspects of their work to experienced teachers and focus on their core responsibilities. Creating deputy or middle manager roles in primary schools above a certain size and adding additional career steps in secondary schools would strengthen school leaders' ability to capitalise on teachers' skills, exercise autonomy in their differentiation of roles within the school while at the same time creating a pipeline for future school leaders.

The career structure could build on existing roles, such as those of middle managers and subject team leaders, but further formalise teachers' career progression. Career stages should be linked to competency levels (e.g. corresponding to a differentiated set of teacher standards and including a dimension for leadership competency). Teachers' advancement should be associated with salary progression and based on merit, rather than their seniority. The Community should consider removing the minimum age for permanent contracts in selection and promotion positions for the same reason. A renewed process for career advancement could be based on a voluntary system of registration statuses that teachers need to obtain to apply for a promotion and periodically renew.

The decision on teachers' career progression or certification for professional advancement should have an external component and a greater degree of formality than teachers' regular formative appraisal, in order to ensure fairness across schools. While the process can be mostly school-based and led by the school leader (or another member of the management group), the inspectorate or an accredited external evaluator with expertise in the same area as the appraised teacher should be involved (OECD, 2013, p. 334[57]). In systems with an established professional organisation of teachers, like Estonia (see Box 4.8), such organisations can play an important role in the process, which can increase teachers' buy-in while also strengthening the profession's self-governance. Teachers' appraisal could thereby be turned into a regular

opportunity for professional growth and provide additional incentives for teachers to build their expertise by engaging in continuing professional learning (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[52]). Better prospects for career progression could also improve teachers' long-term motivation and raise the profession's attractiveness for top-performing students considering initial teacher education.

Box 4.8 provides an example from Estonia where a multi-stage career structure was introduced at both the primary and secondary levels. Although the career structure – at the time of the OECD review – was still lacking a link to increased salary levels, it used a competency-based process of certification that directly assessed whether a teacher had acquired the skills needed to perform at the different stages of the career, using teacher professional standards as a reference (Santiago et al., 2016, p. 25[81]). Other OECD countries have developed teacher career structures that allow not only for vertical progression, but also for horizontal differentiation. Singapore's career structure, for example, offers three parallel streams (teaching track, a leadership track, and a senior specialist track), each comprising at least four stages of career advancement (Crehan, 2016[82]; OECD, 2019[5]).

Box 4.8. Introducing a multi-stage structure of the teaching career in Estonia

In 2013, Estonia introduced a vertical career structure alongside a reformed system of teacher professional qualifications. Its main aim is to serve as a reference for teachers' competence development and it comprises four distinct stages, reflecting different levels of professional skills and experience. Unlike many other multi-stage career structures, the stages are not formally linked to salaries and access to higher stages is voluntary. The career stage Level 7.1 is awarded indefinitely, while Levels 7.2 and 8 are awarded for a five-year period after which the teacher must reapply.

- Teacher (Level 7.1): Awarded upon entrance into the teaching profession, following the completion of an initial teacher education programme (at Master's degree level) or following the recognition of professional qualifications for this level by the teacher professional body.
- Senior teacher (Level 7.2): Awarded to teachers who, in addition to their regular teaching activities, support the development of the school and of other teachers and are involved in methodological work at the school level.
- Master teacher (Level 8): Awarded to teachers who, in addition to their regular teaching activities, participate in development and creative activities in and outside their school and closely co-operate with a higher education institution.

The Estonian Qualifications Authority has developed professional standards that define the competences associated with each stage of the career structure. A teacher professional organisation (the Estonian Association of Teachers) is responsible for the certification process that determines teachers' advancement across career stages. Twice a year, teachers can apply for a new certification. A three-member committee oversees the two-stage application process, which involves an evaluation of the candidate's application materials and an interview.

Sources: Santiago et al. (2016[81]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en; Adapted from OECD (2019[5]), *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7aaf050-en.

Support for school leaders should not only come from a stronger school leadership team, but also horizontally from within the school leader community as well as through external support. The German-speaking Community should consider further strengthening the opportunities for in-service school leaders to receive coaching or developing mentorship programmes between experienced and new school leaders, particularly at the primary level. Plans to offer coaching to school leaders though a pilot project starting in 2022 would be an important step in the right direction and should be carefully evaluated to

determine the intervention's effectiveness. In addition to providing coaching to their peers, school leaders should also play an active role in coaching new members of their expanded leadership team, such as middle managers or subject team leaders.

The strengthening of school leadership teams could also be an opportunity to address the under-representation of female teachers in leadership positions. Countries like Austria, for example, have undertaken efforts to address the under-representation of women across the public service, e.g. by selecting women among equally skilled candidates in the departments concerned and by giving them priority in education and training that enables them to take up roles involving higher functions and advanced skills (see Box I.3.2 in (OECD, 2019[12])).

Reform the teacher recruitment process and service codes to enable school leaders to build successful teams, facilitate teacher mobility and create synergies across networks

The German-speaking Community should seek to harmonise teachers' service codes across school networks and modernise the recruitment process in GUW and OSU schools to enable school leaders to build effective teams of teachers. The Community emphasises the autonomy of school networks and school leaders to develop their own pedagogical profiles and approaches. To turn this pedagogical autonomy into practice, it is important for school leaders to create a good match between their schools' educational project and their teachers to ensure that they can contribute to their schools' vision and continuing improvement. The Community should therefore advance plans, formulated through the GPGS project (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[28]), to allow school leaders, or school providers, to consider additional information to gauge the performance and motivation of applicants as well as their fit with the school. This could involve conducting interviews, considering motivation statements or assigning greater weight to evaluation results. To further mitigate disruptions caused by the points-based hiring system, the Community should also consider giving school leaders the possibility to request retaining teachers on justified grounds, even where the points-based system might assign another teacher priority.

Giving schools a greater say in the recruitment of teachers can carry certain risks, including inequities that arise if advantaged schools are better able to attract the most qualified teachers. More autonomy in the recruitment process also requires sufficient leadership, managerial and administrative capacity (OECD, 2019, p. 251[5]). Some systems therefore combine elements of a centralised recruitment system (e.g. centralised vacancy databases or application processing) to ensure administrative efficiency and equity, with a higher degree of school autonomy, for example by allowing schools to express their preferences over a given number of centrally-ranked candidates or to recruit a certain share of their teaching force locally. Such mixed systems are used by some German federal states that allow schools to exercise greater autonomy in the selection of teachers for a limited number of position while recruiting the remaining teachers through a centralised process (see Box 4.9).

Box 4.9. School leaders' role in teacher recruitment in German federal states

Some federal states in Germany, including Hesse and Baden-Württemberg, operate a mixed teacher recruitment system, which allows schools to select teachers for a certain share of open positions each year by advertising them through a database managed by the state government. These individual vacancy submissions are often related to particularly urgent staff needs or special profiles sought by the school. The remaining positions are assigned by bureaucratic agencies above the school level. Applicants for teaching positions can choose to apply directly for an open position at a specific school or to submit an application to the general pool of applicants. This allow schools to have a say in their teacher recruitment while most of the logistical and administrative demands of the process are dealt with at a higher level of administration.

Sources: OECD (2019[5]), *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7aaf050-en; Nusche, D. et al. (2016[22]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Austria 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264256729-en.

Another source of inefficiency in the German-speaking Community's teacher recruitment system stems from its lack of a unified teacher service code – a point that has been underlined by stakeholders and authorities during the GPGS reform process (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016[28]). Making the service code and the selection and eligibility criteria for teaching positions consistent across providers would increase transparency and provide the basis for further synergies in the recruitment process across the three networks. A unified service code could, for example, facilitate the introduction of a common pool of substitute teachers serving schools of all three networks. To improve teachers' mobility in the first years of their careers, the Community should also consider recognising teachers' prior service across school networks, rather than requiring the 720 days of service needed for a permanent position to be accrued in schools of a single provider.

The German-speaking Community has already made some progress to reduce the administrative burden caused by the teacher recruitment process. In April 2021, the application process for GUW schools has, for the first time, been organised through a new digital recruitment platform, which allows candidates to create profiles and submit materials that they can use again when re-applying in the following years. The application platform should be evaluated based on teachers' experience and, if it is found to have rendered the application process more efficient, it should be explored whether the platform can be expanded to serve the recruitment processes in the OSU and FSU networks as well (MDG, 2022[1]). Greater central co-ordination could also help to reduce frictions in the recruitment process, such as the difficulty to find replacements for teachers' taking late decisions on their offers.

A reform of the teacher recruitment system and service codes could also support efforts to strengthen the central monitoring of key indicators that may affect the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The ministry is currently undertaking an important prognostic exercise to forecast the demand for teachers until 2040. A more unified service code would provide a better basis for centrally monitoring staff shortages, unfilled vacancies or the number of teachers employed without requisite qualifications via the deviation system. Keeping records more systematically could also facilitate monitoring the implementation of new staff policies, such as the open-ended contract during the career entry phase. (For a more detailed discussion of the use of data in the system, see Chapter 2).

Strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation and development planning, reconsider the division of responsibilities for external evaluation and create synergies in the follow-up support

Since 2009, the German-speaking Community has made significant progress to foster school improvement by introducing regular internal and external school evaluations. Nevertheless, schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation and continuous work on their development remains uneven. To address this challenge, the Community should seek to strengthen the capacity of the different external support services to assist schools in following up on evaluation results. It should also work to reduce institutional divisions between the support services that make it harder for them to provide schools with easily accessible help and the seamless assistance that they need.

The government's current working plan for 2019-2024 proposes investigating the feasibility of creating an institute for school development (*Institut für Schulentwicklung in Ostbelgien*, ISEO) to serve as an umbrella for services aimed at supporting schools' development (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020[36]). The plan suggests that the institute could include the school development counselling service, the external evaluation, the pedagogical advisory services for primary and secondary education, educational research and monitoring, as well as – potentially – the ZFP's competency centre (*Kompetenzzentrum*), which advises schools on the inclusion of children with special educational needs and offers pedagogical diagnostic procedures, complementing the work of the ministry's school advisory service for inclusion and integration (*Schulberatung für Inklusion und Integration*), which was established in 2019 (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021[83]).

More closely integrating the work of the school development counselling service and the pedagogical advisory services could be an important step to create synergies and facilitate their collaboration. Bringing these services together would also make it easier for schools to access the support they need. Furthermore, integrating the AHS' capacity for research and data monitoring could improve the use of data (e.g. from VERA, PISA and the Diploma in French Language Studies [*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF]) to support schools' self-evaluation and improvement efforts. While the creation of the institute could create synergies between the support services and make their work more effective, it should also be seen as an opportunity to review their capacity and strengthen it where needed. This should also identify areas where additional expertise is required, such as pre-primary education or special education needs (the latter would be strengthened through a closer collaboration with the ZFP's competency centre).

Furthermore, the division of responsibilities between the school inspection and the external evaluation creates discontinuities in the school evaluation process and should be reconsidered. The current split of evaluation responsibilities between two institutions is unusual in international comparison and should be reviewed to provide greater clarity on the institutions' role in strengthening school's capacity for continuous improvement. In many OECD countries, the functions currently performed by the inspectorate and the external evaluation in the German-speaking Community, are combined in a single institution (OECD, 2013[57]). Another option would be to more strongly differentiate the institutions' roles by clearly focusing the inspection's role on the summative evaluation of individual teachers (including the evaluation at key career stages, as described above), while endowing the external evaluation with a more formative role and the responsibility to oversee the entire school improvement cycle, including the schools' preparation and implementation of development plans.

In any case, the school evaluations should further emphasise appraising schools' internal evaluation processes in order to support the continued shift from a system of external accountability towards a model based on structured self-evaluation and internal accountability for improvement. The evidence suggests that systems based on "internal accountability" are more effective than compliance-oriented evaluation systems since they encourage teachers and schools to take ownership of their school improvement and exercise agency to make such improvement happen, including through professional learning (OECD, 2013[57]). Evaluations should therefore place particular emphasis on schools' processes for

self-evaluations, formative staff-appraisal and development planning and evaluate whether they use them effectively, rather than focusing on compliance alone. Where needed, targeted, intensive follow-up support (from the school development counselling services, pedagogical advisory services or others) should be readily available to schools to help them implement their development plans and address the needs identified in the evaluation process. In Wales, for example, schools' self-evaluation and improvement plans are reviewed by regional "improvement advisors" who aim to act as "critical, but supportive friends" to schools (OECD, 2020, p. 69[40]).

In the longer-term, the German-speaking Community could consider moving towards a risk-based approach to school evaluation by reducing the frequency and intensity of evaluations for high-performing schools. In the Netherlands, the Inspectorate of Education has implemented risk-based inspections in 2007, which allows schools that are not considered "at-risk" to undergo a "basic inspection" while at-risk schools receive more frequent and in-depth inspections (Nusche et al., 2014, p. 130[84]). A risk-based approach could acknowledge the progress made by schools with strong self-evaluation systems while focusing the evaluation's resources and follow-up support on schools that are most in need of rapid improvement.

One of the main challenges school systems encounter in shifting from compliance and external accountability to primarily internal accountabilities is developing capacity. Fullan et al. (2015[85]) stress that any attempt to reset evaluation and accountability structures must begin by building the professional capacity of teachers and leaders, including their responsibility for continuous improvement and for the success of all students (OECD, 2021[32]). To strengthen this capacity, the German-speaking Community should refine its leadership training and provide appropriate and accessible resources with a view to help leaders develop and use multi-year school development plans to advance their "school project", to place the quality of teaching at the centre, and to collect and use relevant data to support the process. School leaders should also be supported in mobilising the whole school community in their schools' development. A greater emphasis on collaboration, distributed leadership and continuing professional learning in schools (see above) would complement and support this process, as would strengthening inter-school collaboration, e.g. by pairing experienced school leaders with less experienced peers.

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Notes

[1] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[2] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[3] The general qualifications for teachers are stipulated in the „*Königlicher Erlass vom 22. April 1969 zur Festlegung der erforderlichen Befähigungsnachweise der Mitglieder des Direktions- und Lehrpersonals* […]“ [Royal Decree of 22 April 1969 stating the necessary qualifications of teaching and school leadership staff (…)]

[4] „*Dekret zur Festlegung des Statuts der subventionierten Personalmitglieder des offiziellen subventionierten Unterrichtswesens und der offiziellen subventionierten PMS-Zentren*“ (9 March 2004) [Decree on the statute for subsidised staff members of the official subsidised education system and PMS-centres]

[5] „*Dekret zur Festlegung des Statuts der subventionierten Personalmitglieder des freien subventionierten Unterrichtswesens und des freien subventionierten psycho-medizinisch-sozialen Zentrums*“ (14 December 1998) [Decree on the statute for subsidized staff members of the free subsidised education system and PMS-centres]

[6] The equivalent of the AESS in Germany is the completion of teacher training (*Magister*, 2nd state examination).

[7] Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, *Die sieben Kompetenzsäulen für den Studienbereich Lehramt*, https://static.ahs-ostbelgien.be/wp-content/uploads/diesiebenkompetenzsaeulen.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[8] The seven pillars are: “The teacher as a language expert”, “The teacher as a knowledge expert”, “The teacher as an educator/pedagogue [*Erzieher*]”, “The teacher designs and accompanies learning processes”, “The teacher observes, diagnoses and evaluates”, “The teacher has social competences”, “The teacher as a link of society [*Bindeglied einer Gesellschaft*]”. The new competency profile was still under development at the time of the review.

[9] Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (2021), *Bildungswissenschaften - Aufnahmeverfahren*, https://www.ahs-ostbelgien.be/fachbereiche/bildungswissenschaften/aufnahmeverfahren/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[10] To enrol in the CAP programme, applicants need to have completed a master craftsman diploma (*Meisterdiplom*), a bachelor’s degree or equivalent qualification. The CAP+ requires a completed bachelor’s or master’s degree or equivalent qualification.

[11] Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

[12] Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (2021), *Berufseinstiegsphase*, https://www.ahs-ostbelgien.be/weiterbildungen/berufseinstiegsphase/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[13] Similar rules apply to staff employed at the AHS and Kaleido, but they need at least a “good” rating in their latest evaluation to obtain a temporary open-ended contract.

[14] Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2020), *Dekretentwurf über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2021*, https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-255/620_read-62349 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[15] Vice principals receive a monthly bonus of EUR 400 and middle managers and workshop leaders of EUR 250, which are multiplied by a consumer price index (1.741 on 1 January 2021).

[16] MDG (2018), *Fachberater und Fachteamleiter für die Sekundarschulen gesucht!*, http://www.ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-75/8302_read-53221/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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[19] Government of the German-speaking Community (2019), *Dekretentwurf über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2020*, http://www.ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-255/620_read-58835 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[20] Deutsche Akademie für Pädagogische Führungskräfte (2021), *Führung und Management in der Schulleitung (FuM)*, https://dapf.zhb.tu-dortmund.de/zertifikatskurse/fuehrung-und-management-in-der-schulleitung/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[21] MDG (2018) *Dekretentwurf über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2018*, https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-255/620_read-53700/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[22] The bonus was raised to a non-indexed value of EUR 250 in the school year 2021/22, as stipulated in Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2020), *Dekretentwurf über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen 2021*, https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-255/620_read-62349 (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[23] MDG (2019), *Stellenberechnung im Regelgrundschulwesen*, http://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/PortalData/21/Resources/downloads/home/schulvorschriften/Schulvorschrift_Stellenberechnung_im_Regelgrundschulwesen_13052019.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[24] Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2020), *Gutes Personal für gute Schulen - Das Konzept für ein moderneres Dienstrecht*, http://www.ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4810/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[25] Government of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2021) *Redebeitrag Ministerin Klinkenberg: Vorstellung der politischen Schwerpunkte*, https://www.lydiaklinkenberg.be/news/vorstellung-der-politischen-schwerpunkte (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[26] The new contract offers a temporary open-ended designation or employment from the start of the teaching career („*Bezeichnung oder Einstellung unbestimmte Dauer ab Dienstbeginn*“).

[27] In German, “Kompetenzorientiert zu unterrichten heißt, dass der Schüler im Zentrum des Unterrichtsgeschehens steht”. See Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2021) *Rahmenpläne* [core curricula], https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2221/4415_read-31778/ (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[28] Only 3 staff members engaged in courses offered by the *Institut de Formation en Cours de Carrière* (IFC), the AHS’ main partner institution in the French Community of Belgium.

[29] Boeskens and Nusche (2021[6]) provide an overview of annual statutory teaching hours in other OECD education systems at different levels of education between 2008 and 2018 (supplementary tables).

[30] „Lehrerinnen und Lehrer verstehen ihren Beruf als ständige Lernaufgabe“ (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2004[10]).

[31] Ontario Ministry of Education (2019), *The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)*, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/induction.html (accessed on 15 December 2021).

[32] The Dutch *Education Lab*, for example, is a network that aims to inform educational policy and practice through scientific research and to communicate scientific evidence on teaching and learning to teachers in accessible ways. The Education Lab grew out of the *Academische Werkplaats Onderwijskwaliteit* [Academic Workshop Educational Quality], a research platform created by Dutch Inspectorate for Education, Maastricht University and Free University in Amsterdam. See www.education-lab.nl (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Annex A. The OECD review team

Luka Boeskens is an Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, where he is currently working on the School Resources Review and the Teachers' Professional Learning Study. He co-ordinated the review. Since joining the OECD in 2015, he has worked on private education, school funding, the organisation of rural and urban school networks, as well as teacher's professional learning, career structures and working conditions. He has co-authored the School Resources Review's synthesis reports on *The Funding of School Education* (2017), school infrastructure (*Responsive School Systems*, 2018) and human resources (*Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, 2019).

Dr. Lucie Cerna is a Project Leader for Strength through Diversity: Education for Inclusive Societies in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, and an Associate Research Fellow at the Centre for Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University Singapore. At the OECD, she has worked on the governance of education, trust, national skills strategies, the educational integration of immigrants and refugees, and student equity and inclusion. Prior to coming to the OECD, Lucie was a Lecturer in Politics at Merton College, University of Oxford, and an Assistant Professor in Global Challenges (Political Economy) at Leiden University, the Netherlands. She holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford, where she focused on the governance of high-skilled migration policies. Lucie has published widely on migration, skills and education issues; her most recent book is *Immigration Policies and the Global Competition for Talent* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Prof. Dr. Rita Nikolai is Professor for Comparative Education at the University Augsburg (Germany). Her publications include monographs on changes in the school systems in the German Laender since 1949 (*Die Unvergleichbaren*, co-author with Marcel Helbig, Klinkhardt 2015), the transformations of the school systems in the East German Laender and Berlin after the reunification (*Schulpolitik im Wandel*, Peter Lang 2018) and a volume on private school developments in different world regions (*Private Schools and School Choice in Compulsory Education*, co-author Thomas Koinzer and Florian Waldow, Springer VS 2017). Her articles and book chapters deal also with private school developments, social inequality, the role of political parties and teacher unions in school politics and changes in education regimes.

Annex B. Agenda of the OECD review visit

Table A B.1. Virtual review visit programme

Monday, 17 May 2021	
09:00 – 10:00	Minister of Education and Scientific Research Lydia Klinkenberg
10:30 – 11:15	Kaleido Ostbelgien
11:30 – 12:30	Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (AHS)
14:00 – 14:45	Ministry of the German-speaking Community (MDG) Department of Culture and Youth
15:00 – 15:45	MDG Department of Family and Social Affairs
16:00 – 17:00	MDG Department of Teaching Personnel
Wednesday, 19 May 2021	
09:00 – 12:30	OECD review team meeting
13:30 – 15:00	MDG Department of Education and the Organisation of Instruction and Department of Pedagogy
16:00 – 17:00	School Inspectorate and School Development Counselling Service
Thursday, 20 May 2021	
09:15 – 14:45	**School visit 1: Pre-primary and Primary School Bütgenbach** • 09:15 – 09:45: Students • 10:00 – 11:00: Teachers/educators • 13:45 – 14:45: Parents
15:15 – 16:15	Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (ZFP) Competency Centre
16:30 – 17:15	Institute for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (IAWM)
Friday, 21 May 2021	
09:00 – 12:45	**School visit 2: Maria-Goretti (MG) Secondary School, St. Vith** • 09:00 – 10:00: School leadership team • 10:15 – 11:15: Teachers • 11:30 – 12:00: Students
14:00 – 15:00	Co-ordination of the FSU school network
15:15 – 16:00	MDG Department of Youth Welfare
16:15 – 17:00	Parents' Association (EBOB)
Tuesday, 25 May 2021	
09:15 – 16:30	**School visit 3: Pre-primary and Primary School César Franck Athenäum (CFA), Kelmis** • 09:15 – 09:45: Parents • 10:00 – 11:00: School leader • 11:30 – 12:00: Students • 15:30 – 16:30: Teachers/educators
13:00 – 14:00	External Evaluation
14:30 – 15:00	Teacher Union (CGSP-FGTB)
Wednesday, 26 May 2021	
09:00 – 10:15	Employers' Association and Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK)
11:00 – 11:45	Meeting with national co-ordinator on the overall vision for education (*Gesamtvision Bildung*)
12:00 – 13:00	Research seminar • Dr. Sabrina Sereni (Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien) • Florence Gennen (Pater-Damian-School) • Dr. Silke Stahl-Rolf (VDI Technologiezentrum) • Meggie Jost (Bischöfliches Institut Büllingen)
15:00 – 15:45	Institute for Civic Education (IDP)
16:00 – 17:30	Youth Council of the German-speaking Community (RdJ)

Thursday, 27 May 2021	
09:00 – 10:00	Local authorities (school alderwoman and mayor), Municipality Bütgenbach
11:00 – 12:30	Economic and Social Council (WSR) working group *Leitbild Bildungssystem*
14:15 – 15:15	Employment agency and study group School and Economy
15:30 – 17:00	Co-ordination of the OSU school network and municipality school alderwomen
Friday, 28 May 2021	
09:30 – 13:15	**School visit 4: Robert-Schuman-Institut (RSI) Secondary School, Eupen** • 09:30 – 10:30: School leadership team • 10:45 – 11:45: Teachers • 12:00 – 12:30: Students
14:00 – 14:45	MDG Department of Infrastructure
15:00 – 15:45	Teacher Union (CSC)
16:15 – 17:00	Teacher Union (FGÖD)
Wednesday, 2 June 2021	
09:00 – 13:00	OECD review team meeting
14:00 – 16:00	Presentation of preliminary impressions by the OECD review team
Friday, 11 June 2021	
12:00 – 13:00	**School visit 1: Pre-primary and Primary School Bütgenbach (cont.)** • School leaders

Note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the review mission and all interviews were conducted virtually using video conferencing technology; The OECD review team received additional information in writing from parents' representatives of the Maria-Goretti (MG) Secondary School and the Robert-Schuman-Institut (RSI) Secondary School.

Annex C. Translations of key terms

Table A C.1. Translations of key terms used in the OECD report

German	English
Abweichungssystem	Deviation system
A-Klassen (Beobachtungsstufe)	A-stream (observation stream)
Allgemeinbildender Sekundarunterricht	General secondary education
Arbeitgeberverband	Employers' association
Arbeitsamt	Employment agency
Auswahlamt	Selection position
Außerschulische Betreuung (AUBE)	Out-of-school care
Befähigungsunterricht	Qualifying classes
Beförderungsamt	Promotion position
Berufliche Integration durch Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung (BIDA)	Vocational integration through training guidance in dual education
Berufsbildender Sekundarunterricht	Vocational secondary education
Berufseinstiegsphase	Induction period
bezeichnet	designated
Bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer (BVA)	subsidised contract staff
B-Klassen (Anpassungsstufe)	B-stream (assimilation stream)
Dienstrechtsreform	eform of the teacher service code
Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF)	Diploma in French Language Studies
Duales Studium	Dual degree / joint vocational and bachelor studies
eingestellt (FSU schools)	employed
ernannt (GUW and OSU schools)	appointed
erstankommende Schüler/innen (EAS)	newly arrived immigrant students / newcomer students
Fachberatung(en)	Pedagogical advisory services
Fachteamleiter	Subject team leader
Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen (FSU)	Free Subsidised Education System
Funktionssubvention	operating grant
Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen (GUW)	Community Education System
Gesamtvision	Overall vision
Gesellenbrief	Certificate of apprenticeship
Gutes Personal für gute Schulen (GPGS)	Good personnel for good schools
Hausaufgabenschulen / Hausaufgabenbetreuung	"Homework schools" / homework supervision
hochschwellige Förderung	High-threshold support
Industrie- und Handelskammer (IHK)	Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes (IAWM)	Institute for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
Institut für Demokratiepädagogik (IDP)	Institute for Civic Education
Klassenrat	Class council
Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm (LAP)	Government's working programme
Lehre (Duale mittelständische Ausbildung)	Apprenticeship
Lehrerdienstrecht	Teacher service code
Mediothek / Lehrer-Mediothekar	Resource library / Resource librarian
Meisterausbildung	Master craftsperson programme

Ministerin für Bildung, Forschung und Erziehung	Minister of Education and Scientific Research
Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (MDG)	Ministry of the German-speaking Community
Nachteilsausgleich	compensation for disadvantage
niedrigschwellige Förderung	Low-threshold support
Notenschutz	"grade protection"
Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen (OSU)	Official Subsidised Education System
Pädagogischer Rat	School council
Rahmenpläne	Core curricula
Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (RdJ)	Youth Council of the German-speaking Community
Regelunterricht	Mainstream education
Regionales Entwicklungskonzept (REK)	Regional development concept
Schulentwicklungsberatung	School development counselling service
Schulinterne Fachcurricula	School-based subject curricula
Schulprojekt	School project
sehr gut, gut, ausreichend, ungenügend, mangelhaft	very good, good, satisfactory, insufficient, deficient
sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf	special education needs (SEN)
Stoffverteilungspläne	Material distribution plans
Studienkreis Schule & Wirtschaft	study group School and Economy
Technischer Sekundarunterricht	Technical secondary education
Teilcurricula	Partial curricula
Teilzeitunterricht (TZU)	Part-time vocational education
Übergangsunterricht	Transitional classes
VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (BSDG)	Association of Catholic Episcopal schools
Weiterbildungskonzept	Professional learning concept
Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat (WSR)	Economic and Social Council
Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft (WFG)	Business development agency
zeitweilig auf unbestimmte Dauer	temporary open-ended
zeitweilig befristet	temporary fixed-term
Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes (ZAWM)	Centre for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
Zentrum für Förderpädagogik (ZFP)	Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy
ZFP Kompetenzzentrum	Competency centre

Reviews of National Policies for Education

Quality and Equity of Schooling in the German-speaking Community of Belgium

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*") to guide reforms across the education sector for greater quality and equity. To support this process, the OECD review offers an independent analysis of the German-speaking Community's school system and assesses the system's strengths and challenges from an international perspective. It provides a description of the system's policies in international comparison and proposes options for future reforms, covering pre-primary to upper secondary education. The analysis addresses the funding and governance of school education, policies to support equity and inclusion, the evaluation system, school leadership and the development of the teaching profession. The report aims to highlight opportunities for the German-speaking Community to build on the strengths of its school system, enhance the effectiveness of its resource use and ensure that the system delivers the best outcomes for all students.

Co-funded by the European Union

PRINT ISBN 978-92-64-64913-2
PDF ISBN 978-92-64-33872-2

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